



THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

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No. 14.

Price, Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES IN NEW ORLEANS



BY

N. B. LAWSON

THE BOGUS RANCHERO SHRANK BACK AS JESSE JAMES COVERED HIM WITH A REVOLVER.



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JESSE JAMES IN NEW ORLEANS;

OR,

The Man in the Black Domino.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE MONK AND THE RANCHERO

The carnival is on.

New Orleans blazes with lights, and on every hand the ear is greeted by the various noises that betoken the arrival of Rex, the king.

Tin horns do their best to deafen one, and what with shouts and laughter and pistol-shots, the racket is tremendous.

Each recurring February the old city on the lower Mississippi shakes off the lethargy that generally hangs over her borders, and for a short space of time revelry runs mad.

Even in Rome or Madrid the people hardly give themselves over to the wild gayeties of the carnival with more fervor than is shown by the citizens of the Crescent City, aided by the strangers within her gates.

These latter are numerous.

They come flocking hither from all northern points for days before the time set.

Thousands wend their way south each year to welcome the coming of King Momus, for the carnival has become a settled institution with New Orleans.

Among the numerous people thronging the streets during the first night of the gay festivities, a man dressed as a ranchero seems interested in the sights, and at the same time endeavors to attract as little attention as he possibly can.

He seems to be a well-proportioned fellow, and, judging from his figure, one who would prove quite a figure in an encounter at close quarters.

While he wanders up and down the brilliantly illuminated square, passing among the crowds of merry maskers, he seems to be looking for some one, judging from his actions.

More than once he starts, and eagerly examines some figure near by.

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Then, as if in doubt, he forces an opportunity to face the person in mask in order to give a certain signal.

On each occasion he fails to receive a reply, and, shaking his head, goes on.

Because success does not come to him at once, he does not seem to despair.

Around him are strange figures, representing all manner of gnomes, cavaliers, monks, and the historical past.

There are many women on the street, too.

During the carnival season liberty reigns, and many things are done that at another time would be frowned upon.

Many of these women are masked like their consorts, and not a few dressed to represent famous characters in the past.

They lend a dash of color to the scene.

A gathering of men alone, as a general thing, lacks an element of variety, as they realize out in Western mining regions, where the flutter of a petticoat descending from the stage would cause every miner to knock off work for the day.

Stag parties may be all very well in their way, but they represent only half of life.

Most of the women on the streets are respectable, and some even belong to the highest families, for, with escorts, it is customary for them to see the sights during this period of revelry.

The ranchero moves on.

A procession enters the square, and the noise becomes almost deafening.

Through it all he watches his game, and keeps on the lookout for the party whom he hopes to discover.

Jostled by the crowd, he maintains his reserve, and shows no anger.

During this season of merry-making, the one who exhibits temper is soon buffeted by the crowd.

All must be taken with good nature, whether it be a shower-bath, or a handful of rice dropped down one's back by a mischief-loving Creole from a balcony overhanging the pavement—a favorite amusement of the sex, by the way.

The ranchero has watched six successive padres, and made each one a secret signal without receiving the expected reply.

He despairs not.

Sooner or later he will come across the party he desires to see.

There is plenty of time.

People continue to pass him by.

It may be noticed that the ranchero does not wander far from the statue near which he has taken up his station.

Perhaps this is because it proves to be a good point of observation.

Again, it may be that he has made it a rendezvous with the party he expects to meet.

The tide flows by.

More than one merry girl, masked and in the keeping of an escort, notices the quiet ranchero, and throws a handful of rice over him.

He only laughs, and pretends to throw a kiss after these mischief-loving Creoles, for every one of these people is abroad on this, the first night of the carnival.

Throngs of negroes may be seen, all agog with the excitement of the hour.

Their mercurial temperament makes them fit subjects for such a scene.

Excitement is food to the average darky as seen in the South.

He would like seven holidays in the week, and if an eighth could possibly be crowded in, so much the better.

Another padre heaves in sight.

He is stout, and seems a jolly fellow from the way he carries on, roaring lustily at some comical genius in the procession, and exciting laughter from those around him by the witty sallies he makes.

The ranchero sees him.

He places himself directly in the way of the padre, where he cannot fail to catch his eye, and waits for his coming.

A minute later the cowled masquerader arrives just in front of him.

At sight of the ranchero blocking his path, he bawls out some witty remark.

When the other makes a peculiar gesture, it is astonishing to note the change that occurs.

The padre drops his exuberant spirits and becomes a meek as a lamb.

A tortoise drawing its head within its shell could not afford a more perfect simile than does his action just then.

He answers the signal.

Then the ranchero turns and walks away, followed by the padre.

Not a word has been spoken, but the padre appears to understand what is meant, for he keeps the other under his eye.

No longer does he attract attention by the boisterous manner in which he addresses those around—not a word escapes his lips.

Even when a colored lad, plunging down the street, escape the clutches of some party upon whom he has been playing a trick, darts between the padre's legs.

almost upsetting him, does he venture to sound his basso notes.

A change has come over the spirit of his dream.

Business claims his attention to the exclusion of such follies as reign around.

The ranchero leads the way to a spot close beside the statue. Here they will be comparatively free from the jostling crowd.

Reaching this, he leans carelessly against it and waits for the other's arrival.

When the stout padre comes up, he finds the ranchero there.

"You are on deck, Peter?" says this worthy.

"As usual, captain," returns he of the padre gown and hood, rattling the chain that encircles his waist, and from the end of which dangles a cross.

"I began to think you might fail me. Six monks and friars went by. To every one I gave the signal, but never an answer came back."

"Did I ever fail you?"

"Not knowingly; but accidents will happen even in the best regulated families, you know, and I began to fear some one might have taken a notion to lay hold of you."

The padre laughs.

"It would take two to encircle my waist as I am at present."

"That pillow must seem pretty warm, Peter."

"Yes, indeed, captain."

"Peter, to business."

"Yes."

"Have you seen her?"

"I reckon I have."

"Tell me about it, man."

"You see, I was lounging in the French market, just as you told me to do, and watching every female that came along, when I caught sight of a face I recognized."

"Thanks to the photograph I showed you."

"Yes, that was what did the business, captain. As soon as I set eyes on the girl I knew it was Beatrix, and I followed her."

"You were no monk then?"

"I was a Creole, a quiet, unassuming sort of a chap, not apt to attract attention anywhere."

"Well, you followed her?"

"Yes. She had a colored woman following her and carrying the basket, while the girl did the purchasing."

"I found no trouble in tracking her home. There's the address."

He hands the ranchero a card, at which the other glances, there being light enough to make out the characters inscribed thereon.

"That is good, Peter. What more?"

"While I was watching the house I suddenly became aware of the fact that some one was doing the same kind office by me."

"The deuce!"

"That is what I thought. He was a rough-looking fellow, wearing a big felt hat, and I soon saw he had me under his eye."

"Instead of running away, I walked toward him, and, just as I expected, he accosted me."

"A word with you, neighbor."

"Just as you please," I replied.

"You seem interested in that house."

"The white one with the green shutters?"

"Yes."

"Truth to tell, I'm not so much interested in the house as in the beautiful creature who went into it," I answered, boldly.

"With that he ground his teeth."

"What do you know of Ma'amselle Beatrix?" he demanded, with a frown.

"Ah! is that her name? It is as beautiful as her face—charming!"

"Answer my question!" he said, stamping his foot, angrily.

"I know nothing about her. Seeing her in the French market several times, my curiosity was aroused to know where so beautiful a creature could live, and meaning no harm, I took the liberty of following her home to-day."

"Is that all?" he demanded.

"Surely. What more would you expect? If I did wrong, I am ready to apologize to her, or to fight a duel with you, monsieur," I replied.

"At that he laughed."

"My words had thrown him off his guard."

"We will not quarrel about that, neighbor; but do not repeat this escapade. The lady has friends who will resent such impudence in a way that might not prove comfortable to you."

"I hastened to assure this ogre that since my curiosity was satisfied I would trouble the beautiful young lady no more."

"With that I walked away, leaving him to stand guard before the white house, and feeling satisfied myself that I had learned all I wanted."

"Peter, you did well."

"Thanks, captain. Praise from you sounds pleasant in my ears. I am glad you are satisfied."

"We have located Beatrix. Now, regarding this gruff sentry, he can be no other than Anson Merrick."

"That is my idea to a dot."

"He is a man always wide awake, and we can feel certain he will not let us win the game at a canter. I

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never knew of a man I thought more of as an enemy than this one."

"Still, when Paul Smith opposes him, I don't fear the result."

"No flattery, Peter. Wait and see!"

"Yes, wait and see!" whispers a dark figure on the other side of the statue, and whom they have failed to notice.

CHAPTER II.

THE LISTENER BEHIND THE STATUE.

"What is next on the programme, captain?" asks the monk.

"By following Beatrix, we have found Merrick; now there is another in New Orleans who is interested in this case."

"I can guess who you mean—the man who left the steamer up the river and came on by rail, so as to get here ahead of you—Jesse James."

"That is the man!"

"Why do you want to find him?"

"He holds the key by which we can unlock this mystery; without it we are helpless."

"I see."

"Fortunately I have more than one clew by means of which I may locate him."

"Then I suppose our next move will be to run across this Missouri terror."

"Yes."

"Tell me how to find him, captain."

"Later on, Peter. Just now I have a job on hand."

Saying which, the ranchero coolly draws an enormous bowie knife from his collar, and begins to whet it on his boot upper.

The monk watches with interest.

Some one else near by starts and trembles as he hears the ominous sounds.

"Peter."

"Yes, captain."

"How would you like a pair of ears to hang up in your curiosity shop?"

"It depends on whose they are," soberly answers the monk, beginning to solve the puzzle.

"These happen to be an extra finely developed pair, of the donkey brand, especially formed for catching what does not concern them. You are armed, Peter?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Let us see your revolver, man!"

The monk instantly produces one.

"That is a good weapon, and I know of old that you can send a bullet to the heart. Now listen, Peter, while I give you directions. Walk around this statue in that

direction. If any one runs away, drop him as dead as Julius Caesar. Understand?"

"I reckon I do, captain."

"Then forward!"

As Paul Smith the detective speaks, he himself suddenly darts around the base of the statue in a direction contrary to that which he has given to his companion.

At the first glance the coast seems clear.

A closer investigation reveals a figure tucked away in a niche at the base of the statue.

Instantly Paul Smith lays hands on him.

"Come out," he exclaims, gritting his teeth.

A groan answers him.

"I can't," whines a trembling voice.

Paul gives a tug, and the unknown answers with a grunt, but fails to come.

"I'm stuck," he whispers, hoarsely.

Paul has discovered this for himself.

It accounts for the other failing to move off at the first alarm, as he has expected him to do.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

By a simple turn, the ranchero brings about a change—the fellow slips out as he slipped into the niche sideways.

He is not free, however.

A strong hand clutches the collar of his coat.

Thinking to play a trick on his captor, the slippery fellow suddenly releases himself from his loose coat hoping that in this way he will be able to plunge forward and lose himself in the throng near at hand.

Paul has foreseen this, and his clutch is instantly changed to the man's shirt collar.

"Stand still, you beggar," he hisses.

"Oh! I'm as quiet as a lamb," pants the other.

"Even if you escaped me, you are bound to go down before my comrade's revolver: Show your sense by keeping quiet, or by the eternal, off go your ears."

The flash of the ugly bowie lends emphasis to what the detective says.

"Peter."

"Here, captain."

"I've got him, you see. Stand guard near by while I give him the twist."

"Good, captain, I'm on deck," and the monk stands near by, ready to intercept any one who, bent on curiosity, might seek to advance toward the statue.

There seems to be no danger of this, for just at present a very interesting procession is passing by—the shouts are deafening—firecrackers rattle, and balls of colored fire shoot up into the air far above.

No one has eyes for the deserted statue, as it is removed from the line of march.

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The prisoner has heard the words of his captor with considerable apprehension.

What does he mean to do?

The detective's words give him an idea that he is about to pass through some sort of torture.

What else can be meant by "the twist?"

"Sit down," says Paul.

"Would you murder me, mister?"

"That depends on you," returns the other, coolly.

"Well, I vote against it," answers the prisoner, stoutly, at which Paul smiles.

"Then do as I tell you."

Both sit down on the base of the statue, the detective maintaining his grip on his man.

"Now, what were you doing behind there?"

"Sticking fast."

"Good for you. What brought you there?"

"My legs."

"Ah! you're one of the smart kind. Now see here; men don't crawl into a place like that unless they have a motive. What was yours?"

"It's a good shelter from the rain."

"But there's no danger of rain with the stars out."

"Then it's a fine hiding-place from the police if you've snatched a purse."

"That wasn't why you crawled in there."

"How do you know, mister?"

"Because you were watching me down below. I saw you. Besides, that hole was empty when we came here. I noticed it myself."

"That settles it."

"You will confess, then?"

"I suppose I might as well."

"If I have reason to believe you tell me the truth, I'll make it pay you."

"That's business."

"On the other hand, my fine duck, if you give me reason to think you're lying, I shall slice your ears off with this knife. I'm a man of my word, as you will find out."

"I can't say more than I know," returns the street arab, sullenly.

Nobody wants you to. Tell only the truth. Now, what's your name?"

"Jed."

"You're a bootblack by trade?"

"Yes. How'd you know that?"

"How did you fall in with the man who employed you to watch me?"

Jed starts and moves uneasily.

He may have had a slight notion to deceive his captor before, but this has now died away, since he realized that the other reads him like a book.

"By chance, cap'n. He paid me to watch you and hear anything you said."

"Do you know who he is?"

"No."

"Describe him."

Jed does so in a manner that marks him an apt student of human nature.

Paul recognizes the portrait he draws, and to himself whispers:

"Jesse James, for all the world; and he knows I am here, confusion take it."

"Is he near by?"

"I reckon."

"Don't you know?"

"I ain't seen him, but he said as how he'd keep an eye on me, dressed in some other way."

"Then you don't know how he appears?"

"Nixy."

"You made an arrangement to meet him?"

"No—that is, yes."

"Careful now!" for the keen edge of the knife had touched the arab's ear, and sent a spark of electricity through him.

"I didn't have any regular appointment, you see, boss; but he said this, that if I didn't run across him before, he'd be in Tony Martin's place an hour from now."

"That's the great dance-house around the corner?"

"Yes."

"How were you to know him?"

"He'll give me a signal."

"Let me have it."

The cold steel hovers around the arab's ear, and occasionally touches his flesh, sending a chill through the man's whole frame; for in stature the fellow is a man, though following the profession of a boy.

"This is it."

He puts his hand to his nose and rubs it down as a reflective man might.

"What is to be your answer?"

"I'm to speak at once, 'cause, ye see, I ain't in no disguise."

"What will you say?"

"It's all done, mister."

"Jed, are you lying to me?"

"I swears I'm telling the truth, cap'n."

"Well, what was he to pay you?"

"A dollar."

"Jed, I'm going to give you two of them."

"That strikes me."

"But you've got to earn them."

"How?"

"I wonder how you'd like playing detective."

Jed gives a whistle.

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"Jest try me," he pants.

"You've been reading up the business?"

"I reckon I have; never seen a detective yet, but I knows lots about 'em."

"I'm a detective; the man who hired you is a notorious outlaw, for whose body, dead or alive, thousands of dollars will be paid."

Jed whistles again.

"Lend me your knife, cap'n," he says, quickly.

"What for?"

"I think I could fetch him."

"Well, nobody wants you to do that. A detective don't go around lying in ambush, and shooting his men like a bushwhacker. We ferret out cases, and twist a man up in a net until he has no means of escape."

"I know it, cap'n, I know it."

"If you want to learn to be a detective you must obey orders."

"Try me."

"Do you really mean it, Jed?"

"Yes, I do."

"I'm inclined to give you a trial. You look like a lad quick to learn."

"That's me every time."

"In following me, did you notice my manner of walking?"

"You bet."

"Could you imitate me?"

Paul has put up his knife now, since he has found another means of holding Jed.

"Try me."

"Then walk over to my man and tell him in my voice I want him."

Jed springs up.

He walks with the same swinging stride the ranchero had assumed.

"He'll do," mutters the detective, watching him with a keen eye.

Jed comes back, followed by Peter, full of wonder at the new turn the case has taken.

"You want me, captain?"

"I was only trying this chap. Did he speak like me?"

"Jove! I thought it was you till I looked again at his clothes."

Jed laughs at this.

"You'll answer, young fellow. Now, I'm going to give you a first order."

"Well?"

"We're both of a size, you notice?"

"I reckon we are, cap'n."

"Then strip off your duds."

"Phew! it's too cool to go without 'em."

"Nonsense. I'm going to provide you with a better suit."

Saying which the detective, standing in the shadow of the statue, began to remove his outer garments, seeing which Jed followed suit.

There, in the semi-darkness, and to the intense wonder of the monk, Paul Smith and Jed transformed themselves into other beings, the street arab becoming a ranchero and the detective assuming the tattered habiliments of a bootblack.

CHAPTER III.

THE BLACK DOMINO.

"Now, listen to me, Jed. You are to walk away with the monk here. Obey whatever he tells you without a question."

"You can trust me, cap'n."

"Peter, bend your head this way."

He gives his subordinate directions, and the monk nods his head.

"You understand now?"

"Everything. Depend on me, captain."

"Then move off. Play your part, Jed, and you are a made man. Remember that although we are in the dark here, as soon as you strike the light, eyes will be upon you all the while. There must be no let down in your character."

"I think I understand it. Anyhow, the chance I've been lookin' for has come, and I ain't goin' to let it slip by, you bet."

"Then off with you."

The monk and the pretended ranchero walk away from the vicinity of the statue.

Their heads are close together, and they appear to be exchanging confidences.

Paul, from his retreat, looks after them and nods his head approvingly.

"That boy will make his mark yet, unless I'm greatly mistaken. It takes these boys from the streets to jump into such places. They rub against the rough edges of life and become as sharp as a diamond. I'll keep an eye on Jed."

His turn has come.

Leaving the shadow of the statue, he skulks along after the two, acting as though he would spy upon their movements.

Thus all of them are soon swallowed up in the crowd, to become parts of its constituent elements.

The excitement is intense.

Wagons pass, each representing some scene in the past history of the country.

Women are singing, men shouting, and the greatest pandemonium prevails.

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Paul has never seen the carnival before, and naturally takes some interest in it.

He has time to spare, too, since an hour must elapse before he can hope to meet Jesse James in Tony Martin's place.

So he stands and gazes.

The spectacle is a brilliant one, for probably at no other place could it be seen to a better advantage than at this point.

How the colored lights flash out against the blue arch overhead, describing graceful curves before they burst into their full glory.

Colored lanterns meet the eye at every turn.

It looks like a scene of enchantment, or one taken from fairyland.

Even prosaic Paul Smith, accustomed to looking on the dull, business side of life, feels his pulses throb with fire as he gazes on the spectacle.

In one way it is Oriental.

Gay costumes brighten the scene on every hand, where the merry makers move this way and that, full of fun and frolic.

No wonder people come from a distance to look upon such a royal pageant—come each year, and remain to the end.

The remembrance of it all rises pleasantly to the mind in days to come.

Paul Smith notices many odd figures, and laughs with the rest.

For the time being he is a spectator, enjoying the fancies of the hour.

When the limit is reached he will once more advance upon the enemy, and with his usual powers force the fighting.

Some men always do their best when they are hard pressed.

Hither and yon the seeming street arab, in his tattered garments, moves.

He scans life from every side.

The strangest scenes are but deserving of passing notice in his mind, for in his stirring life he has looked upon odd sights.

Probably innumerable plots are being carried out in this strange old city during the carnival week, and a royal time it is to conduct such enterprises, where one can mask and go upon the public square unchallenged.

No one can tell what wonderful secrets the darkness covers—what the thoughts, and purposes, and plans of all these people are.

Some of them no doubt cross and recross, and form a network of lines; many never reach their destination, and others only do so after great tribulation.

The time draws near its end.

Paul makes toward the rendezvous appointed between Jesse James and the street arab.

He still observes the pageant that passes and goes on as though it would never end. The wondering spectators applaud, though now hoarse with their shouts.

Near by an old church stands, and from the bell on this rings out the hour.

One!

It is time he kept his appointment.

The house is just around the corner, and he soon reaches it.

Men are passing in and out.

Music comes through the open door, and lights within reveal the scene as Paul Smith reaches the entrance.

He shrugs his shoulders.

It is the same old scene, such as every city can show—vice flaunting its ugly head above the level, and defying the law, which it has blinded with a bribe.

Paul's long service has made him accustomed to such spectacles, and beyond a shrug of his shoulder he does not notice it.

In he goes.

The room is fairly well crowded; many of those present are masked, and much fun is brought about through the instrumentality of a wandering minstrel and a court jester, who have wandered in to get a drink.

Paying little attention to these parties, Paul wanders around.

He notices every one, for it is uncertain what shape Jesse James will assume, and the signal is what must betray him.

Of course the other will recognize him as the man with whom he made the engagement, and approach him in that spirit.

Now and again he is jostled by the crowd, but manages to slip hither and thither without attracting any particular attention.

Dancing is going on in the rear, where the scenes witnessed might rival those of the Mabille in Paris.

When New Orleans goes into this mad revelry she does it with a will.

There is no city in America that presumes to equal her great carnival.

This yearly feast and pageant is a Latin custom, and hence is only found in sunny cities where a certain class of religious people prevail in respect to population.

Such is the case in New Orleans, where the old French families have a great influence in politics; besides, there are the Creoles, and many Spanish, Mexicans, and Italians swell the number, believing in the three days of gayety before Lent.

The system has been tried up North, but when the

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snow comes down upon the lightly clad masqueraders in the procession, it was speedily made evident that the carnival which has so long been famous in Rome, Venice and Madrid, was not suited to colder climes.

When Paul had been in the place some ten minutes, he runs across a man who wears a black domino.

The cloak hides his figure, and an ebon mask performs the same office for his face.

Hence he could not be recognized even by his dearest friend or most bitter foe.

Paul knows him.

He had received the signal.

This black domino is Jesse James.

He has assumed this simple disguise in order to further his plans.

Having given the answering signal, Paul sees the other advance close enough to him so that he may utter the words that were given to Jed, the street Arab.

This settles the matter.

"Follow me," he hears.

Then the black domino turns and mingles with the crowd surrounding the mad dancers.

The music throbs, and the figures of those upon the floor go spinning around like teetotums.

It is enough to make one dizzy to watch them, but shouts urge on the half-crazy contestants, each striving to win the prize offered by the proprietor to the couple who can dance the longest.

Past these groups the domino goes.

Paul Smith is glad of one thing.

At any rate they will be away from the worst of the clamor when the interview takes place.

This pleases him because he has a great dislike for the terrible noise.

No man can think consecutively while such a din is beating upon the tympanum of his ear.

It unnerves him.

Through the crowd of merrymakers still pushing into the den, they make their way.

At length a retired corner is reached.

Into this the domino turns.

Paul has little difficulty thus far in keeping up his character.

As Jesse James does not know the bootblack intimately, he will not notice any little difference in his behavior.

"Jed, you're here, and I take it that's a sign you've succeeded," he says.

To this the other answers with a nod, but the look on his face speaks volumes.

"You crept after that man, Jed?"

"I did."

"When he went away with the monk?"

"Yes."

"Where did they go?"

"To the statue near by."

This last question on the part of his interlocutor tells Paul one thing.

In all probability Jesse James has not witnessed what took place.

It is well.

Had he even a suspicion of what occurred near the base of the statue, he must dwell upon it till the truth is drawn out.

Paul must invent a fictitious interview as having passed between the monk and the ranchero.

This he can well do.

Used to such a business, and possessed of a fertile imagination, he meets the emergency as it comes, and invents a plausible conversation that has just a glimmer of the truth in it.

Jesse James is interested.

He seems to swallow all that is said with a strange eagerness.

Paul also notes that he watches him continually, and hardly knows what to make of this part of the programme.

Can the other suspect?

What ground is there for it?

The Missouri outlaw is a cunning man, and a weasel could be caught asleep as readily as he.

Paul keeps up his part, determined to carry it out, even though the other does suspect him of being other than he seems.

"I saw the ranchero myself, only a few minutes ago, and alone."

"The monk deserted his pard, then."

"And what was strange, the ranchero seemed to have changed his colors."

"Eh?"

"Before you met him he was a quiet fellow, content to take in the sights, and attend to his own business."

"That's just what I took him to be."

"Since then he seems full of deviltry. I found him carrying on like a wild man on the square—singing, shouting, and acting like one mad."

"That's funny."

To himself Paul says something stronger

He mentally makes up his mind that Jed has forfeited all his chances of ever being a detective.

He has made a fool of himself.

Paul is uneasy.

Can the street arab, half-drunk as he is, have shouted out enough of the truth to at least arouse a suspicion in the mind of the other?

It is possible.

When bad whisky gets into a man, there is no accounting for his actions, as the detective has learned long before now.

CHAPTER IV.

A DANGEROUS BLUFF.

Paul has no feeling of fear.

Curiosity urges him on more than any other motive.

He wishes to learn what the other has discovered, if anything, and yet knows he cannot ask questions directly.

There are other ways of reaching the same end.

"A pretty fellow he is to be put on a trail," pursues the domino. "Imagine him crying out that he is a detective and bound to be famous."

"The fool!"

Paul means this.

He has conceived a contempt for the street arab. The chance that has come to him will never again be within the fellow's reach.

No wonder Paul feels uneasy.

Secretly he is glad to remember that he did not intrust more of his mission to Jed.

The latter would have been apt to have betrayed him while drunk.

What if he had loudly announced to the public that he was a detective in search of the notorious outlaw, Jesse James, who was then in the city of New Orleans!

"If all detectives are as silly as this man, I don't wonder about some things that have happened in the past. And yet I saw enough of him on the steamboat to believe him made of different material. It only goes to show how easily we may be mistaken."

"That's true, boss. Speakin' of detectives, d'ye know I've allers longed to be such a feller. The boys sed as how I'd make a good 'un. If so be you're one of them kind, ye might give a feller somethin' of a show."

Is that a chuckle that comes from behind the black mask?

At any rate it is very like.

"Perhaps I may some time, Jed. Just now I'm too busy. Have you anything more to tell me about these two men?"

"I could tell ye lots, but I reckon you don't want me to make it up?"

"Great guns, no. Look here, is that what you've been doing so far?"

"What! In telling ye all I have? That's the truth, mister. I draws the line. I've told everything, and I sez, sez I, that if ye want more I'll have to make it up."

"Don't bother yourself. When I want a story I'll come to you. There's your money, Jed, or whatever

you call yourself. It's rather strange that crazy rancho should have the same name."

"Him—Jed!"

Paul feels a thrill of alarm.

"Yes."

"How d'ye know, mister?"

"I heard him call himself Jed when he declared himself a detective—he repeated the name as though it pleased him—Jed, the Detective."

"I'll have ter look him up."

"Why?"

"He may be me brother. I never knowed who me father an' mother was."

"But if he was your brother, man, he wouldn't be called Jed."

"Ye see, if me parents lost me, they'd be apt ter call the next one by the same name, just to keep it in the fambly like."

"I reckon he don't belong to you, but there are some queer things about this business I'd like to investigate."

"Me, too, mister."

"Jed."

"Yes, sir."

"You might be useful to me."

"If you want a feller that kin crawl through a knot-hole, and hear a pin drop, I'm yer man. Employ me, and I'll serve ye well. Thar's the making of a great detective in Jed Harkins."

Jesse James seemed to ponder.

What is passing through his mind?

Paul would give a good deal to be able to read his mind just then.

Could he be given this power, what wonders must he be able to perform.

Jesse James decides.

He may have another reason back of his apparent meaning, but it does not show.

"I'll give you a chance, Jed."

"Thank ye, mister."

"In the first place, look me in the eye."

This Paul does resolutely, though the eye of the outlaw is a fearful thing to gaze into when the man is terribly in earnest.

"Well," he says.

"That's pretty fair. Now listen; I want to give you fair warning. I'm not a man to be trifled with. If you enter my service and try to betray me, you know what to expect."

The mock Jerry twists his features up into a terrible look, and in Bowery style hoarsely whispers the one thrilling word:

"Death!"

Jesse James chuckles at this tragic acting; he has no

run across this distinct species of the *genus homo* before now.

"It amounts to about that. I never forgive an injury, and if you betrayed my secrets, I'd as soon murder you as take a drink."

"I believe you, mister," calmly responds the New Orleans street arab.

His coolness is astonishing to the other, who can hardly believe his senses.

"Then you engage with me, understanding the consequences of treason?"

"I'm your chicken, boss, and you'll find me a game cock yet, I reckon."

"Well said, boy. We'll have a chance to try your mettle yet. I have some business on hand which requires nerve."

The pretended Jed drew his arm up quickly.

"There's the muscle for you, captain, if that's what you want. I'm ready to tackle anything you bring out."

"Good. Call me Beauregard, Jed."

"What? Is you the gineral that runs the big lottery business?"

"I reckon I am," coolly.

Jed gives a whistle to show his astonishment.

"You don't say. Come, honest bright, now."

"I'm the general. When you take orders from me, you come under military rule."

"I ain't no sojer."

"I'll make you one, Jed. For the present you are an orderly on my staff."

"That's the ticket. I knowed I'd get thar some time; allers told the fellers so. Now, gineral, what are your first orders?"

"Hold your hand up."

"Yes."

"The right one, man."

"Oh! I see; gwine to administer the oath of allegiance, eh? Crack ahead."

"You know the nature of an oath?"

"Well, I swears some."

"I mean an oath taken on your honor, with your hand raised."

"Them's a different kind from what I'm used to, but I reckons I understand."

"Then repeat after me."

"Ready."

"I, Jed Harkins, swear to be faithful to General Beauregard through thick and thin——"

As he pauses the other repeats.

"And if I prove false I deserve the worst fate he can bring on me——"

Jed follows.

"And give him my permit to shoot me on the spot without warning."

This completes it.

"Now, you belong to me, body and soul, Jed. Do you understand it?"

"Reckon so, boss."

"Then listen to what I am about to say. You are well acquainted with the city?"

"Well, I should smile—born here—lived here—and I reckon I'll die here."

"Away down on St. Charles street is a small white house with green shutters; it stands near a tall house with an odd balcony in front, shaped after the style of a heart."

"I know the house," quickly cries the other.

Jesse James eyes him keenly.

Evidently he has an idea the other is simply trying to make himself solid with his new employer by pretending to have a knowledge of matters connected with the case.

"You do, eh?" he asks, slowly.

"I think so."

"Then perhaps you can tell me the name of the party occupying it?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Merrick."

"By Jove! you do know for a fact. Score the first blood for Jed."

Evidently he is pleased with the fact, and has an increasing interest in the other.

"What do you know about Merrick?"

"Nothing."

"Has he any family?"

"There's a gal in the family—a darling, too. I've watched her many a time, and made up my mind that if I ever ventured on the sea of matrimony it would be because I was tempted by such a charming creature."

Jesse James bursts into a laugh.

It seems too ridiculous for anything, this ragged street arab to talk of marrying such an angelic creature as Beatrix Merrick.

Really, it is a great joke.

And the idea of his being tempted to venture upon the sea of matrimony—ye gods, it is a rich thing to repeat.

"Any one else in the house?"

"Yes, there's another party."

"You've seen him?"

"How'd you know it was a man?"

"Well, I'm interested in this game, and know something about it. I'm asking questions for two reasons; one is to learn what you know, and the other to find out if there is anything new you can tell me."

"Well?"

"You've seen that man?"

"Yes."

"How did it come?"

"The fact is, general, I've been and fallen in love with the darling Beatrix, and, wishing to look upon my charmer again, I entered an empty building just back of the little white house. While I waited for my charmer to appear, I saw that man at a window."

"He was a queer customer, I tell ye, and I could see there was something wrong with him."

"Did you learn what his name was?" inquired Jesse James, eagerly.

"Why, the folks down there say he's Jephtha Gordon, and that he's crazy!"

CHAPTER V.

ENGAGED.

What has been said seems to excite Jesse James not a little.

Usually calm and placid, he shows signs of eagerness that escape not the shrewd eyes taking observations near by—eyes half veiled under the drooping lids, but watchful all the while.

The mention of that name excites him, too.

It is a strange one.

Jephtha Gordon!

A name not met with in the ordinary walks of life, and which, once heard, cannot well be forgotten.

"That settles it. You've seen him, Jed. And yet it seems strange you paid no attention to his appeal for assistance."

"I did think of it, but just then I seen the face of my charmer at another window."

"And that drove all other thoughts out of your head for the time?"

"Boss, you've been thar—in love."

The other laughs.

"No doubt, Jed. I'm glad you know the lay of the land in that neighborhood."

"Oh, I can take you thar."

"I may want you to do more."

"Eh?"

"It is possible that you will have to enter the little white house."

"You don't say."

"And take some one out of it."

It is Jed's turn to appear surprised.

He lays an eager hand on the other's arm.

"Boss, do you mean it?"

"I do."

"Gwine to carry her off?"

"Who said that?"

"But, thunder! you wouldn't think of elopin' with that man?"

"Why not?"

"He's mad."

"Don't be too sure."

Jed simply whistles.

Evidently his astonishment allows of no other means of finding a vent.

"At any rate, you have bound yourself to do my will. Perhaps I may change my mind, and take a notion to carry off the girl."

Jed rubs his hand.

"I'm your huckleberry, thar."

"Have you ever done such a business?"

"Well, no; I can't say as I have."

"Then what do you know about it?"

"Blessed little, from experience; but don't ye see I'm inclined that way, which accounts for my feelin' as though I could do it."

"Jed, you're a queer stick."

"I knows it."

"And yet I rather like you."

"That's good."

"We may do some profitable business together before we are through."

"More than a dollar's worth?"

There is a suggestion here.

Jesse James mutters something.

"Confound it, Jed, that was only a beginning. Here, take this, man."

With that he thrusts something into the hand of the other.

It is a bank bill.

"A whole ten-dollar note," gasps Jed, stealing a glance at it.

He acts as though such a thing had never fallen to his lot before, and Jesse James, reading him, makes up his mind that he will find no trouble in getting the street arab to do his bidding.

Jed can have no principles, and money will cause him to attempt nearly anything.

Suddenly Jesse James turns to him, and says:

"Turn around: Do you see that tall man with the long mustache?"

"That there Spanish muleteer?"

"Yes."

"I see the critter."

"I want him removed," calmly.

"Removed?"

"Done away with."

"Oh! you mean he's in your way, and you want him to slide."

"In plain words, I want him killed."

"Well?"

"You have a knife?"

"Yes."

"How much time do you want to do the job?"

Jed hesitates.

"Say ten minutes, general."

"That's a short time."

"It's enough."

"Jed, have you ever dropped your man?"

"No, but I can begin, general."

"You ask no questions."

"It's none of my business."

"Note the time."

"I have."

"Ten minutes will soon elapse. You have no time to lose."

"I'm off, general."

Jed moves away in the direction of the man to whom his attention has been called.

Before he has taken five steps a hand is laid on his shoulder.

Turning he sees the pretended general.

"Where are you going, Jed?"

"To fix the Spanish muleteer."

"Come back here."

"But the ten minutes will soon be over."

"I've changed my mind."

"Oh!"

"And we'll let the fellow live."

"As you say, general."

"Jed, I never meant it."

"What's that?"

"I was only trying you."

"What! didn't you mean to have the muleteer removed?"

"Not at all?"

"Well, I'm blessed. Then you was foolin'."

"Yes."

"To see if I'd do it?"

"That's the idea. I wanted to learn if you knew what blind obedience meant."

"Did I?"

"You passed through the affair with credit. I have great hopes of you."

"What am I to do?"

"Try and find this ranchero, get on his trail, learn where he puts up, and all you can about him."

"I understand."

"Then come to me."

"Where will I find you, general?"

"You can read?"

"Yes."

"Here's an address on this card."

"Will I find you in?"

"If not, wait for me, Jed."

"I'll do that same."

"There's nothing more to be said."

"I can go?"

"Yes."

"I want to ask you something, general."

"Well?"

"If we succeed, am I to get a reward?"

"Certainly."

"What is it?"

"Fifty dollars, Jed."

"What of the darling Beatrix?"

"You don't hanker after her?"

"She's mighty temptin', general. I've a sneaking notion to set up housekeepin' on that fifty dollars."

The other grins.

"Well, I'll tell you what, Jed; if the girl will have you, it's a bargain."

"Hurrah!"

"You don't seem to entertain doubts of success."

"I ain't that kind. When I set my heart on anything I always git that."

"That's what tells in this world, man."

"I've got your promise, general?"

"A conditional one. Remember, I say that if Beatrix will have you I'll give you my blessing."

"That's all hunk. I'm off to find the ranchero."

So Jed clears out.

That is an easy operation, for he is immediately lost to sight amid the numerous masked fun-loving people who have swarmed into the place.

The Mardi Gras is in full swing.

Lent will soon be ushered in, for Shrove Tuesday is followed by Ash Wednesday, when for six weeks the faithful will abstain from various duties and pleasures that mark their ordinary life, until Easter relieves them from the strain.

The principle that seems to underlie all this frolic must be in the line of:

"Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we go into sackcloth and ashes."

When Jed has left the place of dancing, he indulges in considerable quiet chuckling.

Paul Smith has played many a game in his life, but never one that gave better promise of success than this.

He has not only hoodwinked the man against whom he plots, but has been taken into his confidence as a tool.

This is great luck.

It places him in possession of inside figures, just as a speculator might by trickery tap the wires and learn trade secrets.

He looks for the ranchero, but not with the intention of carrying out the order given him by his new employer. On the contrary, Paul has plans of his own.

He fears lest the genuine Jed may manage to betray his secret yet, and if he can find him it is his intention to set the street arab out of the way for the present, even if he has to drug him in order to do so.

So he wanders around.

The sights are still something tremendous, and all through the balance of the night the racket will be kept up, until the next midnight hour rings out, ushering in Ash Wednesday.

He looks for the ranchero.

Among so many strangely-dressed persons it might prove an exceedingly difficult task to discover this person; but Paul has one thing in his favor. He has worn the ranchero costume himself and can easily recognize it.

He keeps a bright lookout on all sides.

Here noisy cowboys ride down the street. Yonder a procession of monks march along with a jolly friar at their head. Yes, it is Friar Tuck, Robin Hood's right-hand man in Sherwood Forest.

All sorts of historical and mythological characters greet the eye.

Merry jests pass around.

Laughter abounds.

A strange scene indeed for an American city, and one that would impress a stranger with the idea that our population is exceedingly foreign, especially in our cities.

Thus some time passes.

Then Paul gives a start, for just ahead of him he discovers the ranchero.

He watches him.

Evidently Jed has been drinking, for he shows signs of it. His actions betray him.

Just as the detective is about to advance he discovers something that calls a halt.

"As I feared. Hang the fool!" he mutters.

CHAPTER VI.

TURNED ADRIFT.

This expression applies to Jed.

The fellow is not up to anything new, but Paul has made a discovery that fills him with a feeling akin to anger.

Paul has suddenly become aware of the fact that a black domino is watching the ranchero.

In this domino he recognizes the very man with whom he has made his bargain.

Some wretched fate has sent Jesse James to the spot just at the moment when, of all times, he would have liked him to remain away.

Things will occur that way.

"There is a destiny that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them as we will."

Never were truer words spoken.

Watching the black domino, Paul sees that he hovers about the ranchero.

The detective is reminded of the wolf awaiting a chance to pounce on his quarry.

Will he advance on Jed?

Paul is sure of it.

Anything else would be too good—this evil fate is bound to follow him.

Yes, the domino draws nearer.

Seeing the inevitable, Paul also chooses his ground, hoping to overhear the interview, for it will tell him what to expect from the other.

He manages to crawl behind some old cases piled up close by.

From his hiding-place he can almost stretch his hand and touch Jed, who, feeling the effects of his liquor, has sat down near by, and seems ready to fall into a drowsy state.

If the domino would only advance.

Luck favors the detective.

As though Jesse James sees a good chance in the present attitude of the other, he advances swiftly to his side.

"Hello! comrade, not going to sleep with all this revelry around. You'll have your pockets cleaned out pretty quick."

Jed looks up lazily.

"I sleep with one eye open. Perhaps this here's a trap for the runaway. I'm up to all the rackets, and don't you forget it, neighbor. Bend yer head down while I tell ye a secret."

The domino does so eagerly.

When Jed whispers he can be heard a dozen feet away—it is a stage whisper.

"I'm a detective, pard, and I'm after big game, don't you forget it. New Orleans will wake up one of these days and find me famous."

"You a detective," repeats the other.

"Certainly. D'y'e doubt it. Don't I look like one? Ain't I got the eyes of a man-hunter?"

"You certainly have, Jed."

"Eh? How did you know me?"

"Oh! I guessed it."

"Who are ye?"

"Never mind now. Perhaps I'm the man who gave you those clothes."

"The detective—well, now, I never dreamed it; but, then, that's only one of the tricks of the trade. We're all up in 'em, ain't it so?"

"Certainly. What have you done, Jed?"

"Ain't seen anything of him yet—been lookin' all around, too."

"Who was that?"

"The man ye said was a notorious outlaw."

Jesse James mutters something when he hears this, and is evidently disturbed.

"You'll run across him yet, Jed."

"What did ye do with 'em?"

"What's that?"

"My ragged regimentals."

"Ah! I forgot. They're gone. You see I have on another suit now. Keep those I gave you."

"But these ain't gwine to do me in my perfesh. Fancy a ranchero blacking boots."

"You forget—you're a detective now, and have no need to black boots for a living."

"Hanged if I didn't forget. That's so, I'm to make lots of money. Dollars will be as plenty with me as nickels was in the past."

"If you live to enjoy them," solemnly.

Something in his tone makes Jed look up, the sleep gone from his eyes.

"What d'ye mean?"

"There's always danger of death."

"That's so."

"And in this case you run a double risk."

"I do, eh?"

"Why, man, at this minute I've got you covered by a revolver held in my lap. If I pressed the trigger you'd be a dead man."

"Then don't press it."

"I won't if you behave yourself."

"Ain't I?"

"That depends on what answers you give me."

"Want to ask questions, eh?"

"See here, Jed, I don't believe you'll do for a detective at all."

"Why not?"

"Because you don't get onto things. Here you've been talking with me some five minutes without guessing who I am."

"Great Cæsar! You said——"

"People don't always tell the truth."

"Then you ain't the detective?"

"Look back. A man hired you to do a certain job. Instead of doing it you turned around and engaged with the man you were hired to watch. That was base treachery."

Jed begins to move uneasily.

He seems to realize that an explosion is about to take place, and as he stands over a magazine, the chances are that he will get hurt.

"Then you——"

"I am the man who first hired you. I know what you have done, and that is why I am here with a revolver bearing on your head, and a pretty good notion to let fly 'Mercy!'"

Jed is frightened—he is a bully by nature and has little spirit beyond his bravado.

"On one condition."

"I consent—I'll tell everything, only put that shootin' iron away."

Jesse James does so slowly, to further aggravate the feelings of the desperate man.

"Tell me how it came about."

"You left me to crawl up to that ere statue an' listen to what they said."

"Yes."

"Well, I did it and learned as how they was detective looking up a case."

"Go on."

"While I was listenin' for all I was worth, one of 'em jumped around an' collared me. Thar wasn't any way of escape, an' I just give in."

"Then he talked to me an' made me believe I'd be a prime detective."

"Do you believe that now?"

"I'm sure I'd make a prime fool."

"That's nearer the truth, Jed. If you keep on between us, you're a dead man—I'll shoot you for betraying me, and the detective'll do the same thing, I reckon."

"There's one consolation—both of you can't get satisfaction out of me."

"That don't improve your chances at all. The best thing you can do is to keep clear of both. You have everything to lose and nothing to gain by keeping up your foolish actions."

"I reckon you can count me out after this. My old business suits me best."

"He's looking for you."

"That man?"

"Yes, with a devil in his heart—if he finds you I reckon Jed Harkins is a dead man."

"He won't get the chance."

"Then you've given up the idea of being a detective?"

"You bet."

"Then I'm done with you."

"I kin go?"

"Yes."

"Blest if I ain't glad to get out of it, boss. I began to count myself a goner."

Jesse James possibly sees something in the crowd that excites his curiosity.

At any rate, he hastily leaves Jed, and plunges into the thick of the procession that moves up and down the street.

Jed looks after him in something like wonder, not

understanding what has taken the other away so hurriedly.

This is Paul's chance.

He emerges from his place of concealment, intending to scare Jed and get him out of the way, as he has ruined the detective's plans by being in the vicinity.

As luck will have it, the street arab hears him and turns around.

Some wagons are passing, and on one a red light burns, throwing a terrible yet brilliant glare upon everything around.

This serves to show Jed the face and garments of the man issuing from the box.

He cannot fail to recognize them, for the face is made up to resemble his own, and the tattered garments have long graced his figure.

This sudden appearance of the detective on the scene causes great alarm in the mind of the bootblack, who doubtless believes his life is in great peril.

At any rate, he gives a subdued howl.

Springing to his feet, he bounds away.

In vain Paul calls after him; in vain he attempts to overtake the man.

Jed loses himself in the passing tide of humanity with the facility that members of his class exhibit.

There is no use endeavoring to find him, nor does Paul care to.

The fellow has made mischief enough with his blunders, and only by a bold stroke can Paul get anything out of his game.

He does not mean to give it up yet, or even to change his plans greatly.

Instead, he posts off to the costumer from whom he rented the ranchero suit.

Have they another like it?

Such places are open day and night during the short carnival season of the Mardi Gras.

It is their harvest time.

The business of a whole season must be compressed in about a week.

He is lucky.

A suit is found that fits him, and which is a duplicate of the lost one.

He pays for both.

Could he have overtaken Jed, it was his purpose to effect another exchange of garments, but the terror of the other put this out of the question.

With a man like Paul Smith, however, there is no such word as fail; when one method comes to grief he changes to another.

Again he sallies forth.

Once more he appears as the bold ranchero, and looks for his game.

Will this clamor keep up all night?

It is astonishing how the excitement spreads; it is really as catching as the measles.

Paul leaves the square where all this brightness is going on, and heads in the direction where lies the little white cottage.

He knows the spot.

What Peter has told him is not all he has learned concerning the mysterious persons in whom Jesse James seems to have such a decided interest.

One thing Paul is sure of; this place will serve as a magnet to the men he wishes to watch, and if he can possess his soul in patience some result is sure to follow.

He has drawn near the place now, and begins to move with caution.

Ah! a light in the white cottage reveals the fact that the inmates are not all asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAD PRISONER.

From what Paul, in the disguise of the street arab, told Jesse James, the reader can have some idea as to how matters stand around the white cottage.

It has at least three inmates—Beatrix, Anson Merrick, the mysterious man, and the party who declares he is not mad, although some people make him out to be so.

There must be something pretty deep about the case to arouse such an interest in Jesse James.

The fact is, there is a fortune at stake.

Jephtha Gordon, the supposed madman, was once connected with a gang of men on the Mississippi under one Captain Ben Hooker.

They were river pirates, and had an enormous treasure stowed away in a secret hiding-place.

They were surprised one night in one of their rendezvous by Federal officers, and all fell in the raid but one—Jephtha Gordon.

Therefore, he is the only one left who knew where the treasure was hidden.

But Gordon had never touched a cent of the treasure, because it was about that time that he commenced to show signs of insanity.

Anson Merrick is his brother-in-law, and has taken him under his care.

Merrick is an unscrupulous fellow. He knows that there is a buried treasure, and he has tried every means in his power to get the secret from Gordon, but Gordon, even in his delirium, does never divulge it.

After a while the story comes to the ears of Jesse James, and he is now bent on securing the treasure, by hook or crook. He used to know Gordon in the old days.

Paul Smith, the detective, is on the track of the treasure in the interests of those from whom it was stolen.

No wonder, then, there is such an interest in Jephtha Gordon and the house in which he is confined.

Paul, upon seeing the light, expresses his satisfaction, and moves closer.

He evidently has some designs upon the inmates of the house.

A few minutes later he is endeavoring to find a loop-hole under the drawn curtain, where he can spy upon those within.

This is hard to do.

Several there are, but they do not seem to be in the proper condition to bring him success, so he wanders along, until finally he finds an entrance, through a bower or arbor, to a side door.

Quick to seize upon such a chance, he soon tries the door, opens it, and is in the house.

Here his caution increases.

He feels that enemies are around him.

Jesse James will be there soon, bent upon rescuing the man held captive there.

The detective mounts the stairs, and, unseen by a living soul, reaches the end of the hall.

Here is a room with the door locked.

Behind that door he will find Jephtha Gordon.

The detective has come here with a purpose.

Since fate has defeated him in one way, he has resolved to try another.

It is nothing to him that there is danger involved. He laughs at that.

Having an inkling of Jesse James' plans, he can plot to defeat him.

He examines the door, and smiles.

It is locked; but how simple a thing for a man of his ability to fit a skeleton key in the hole, and turn it.

Lo! the door is no longer fastened, but yields to the pressure he applies.

Gently it opens.

A light lies beyond.

No movement or exclamation indicates that his action has been noticed, if the room has an occupant, as he believes.

Further the door opens.

Then Paul glides in.

One glance around he gives, and, finding the opportunity favorable, he gently closes and fastens the door once more.

He is shut up with the man who has been called mad.

This individual looks harmless enough now, for he sleeps, his head lying partly on his arm, which in turn rests on a table. The lamplight falls upon his face. It

is that of a man who has long wrestled with some great trouble.

He moans in his sleep.

"Poor devil," mutters the detective, "you've had a pretty hard load to carry, and the end is not yet in sight, I'm afraid."

Whether the whisper of Paul Smith or some strange intuition arouses the man, it would be hard to say, but at any rate the sleeper suddenly raises his head and looks around.

At sight of the intruder he seems startled.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asks, in a hoarse tone.

"Softly, Jephtha Gordon, you have enemies in this house who might hear you."

"Well, ain't you one of them?"

"No, I'm your friend."

Instantly a startling change comes over the man, his face shows the listless mood no longer, but lights up eagerly.

"A friend. Then you come from Jesse James," he says, in a suppressed voice.

"I have just left him."

"He is here—in New Orleans?"

"Yes."

"You have not told me your name."

"That does not matter; call me Jones for short."

"Mr. Jones, have you come to save me?"

"I have come in the interest of justice; there has been some foul work in progress here, and it is my duty to look it up."

"I have waited long."

"Yes."

"And grown weary waiting."

"The time is near at hand when your period of suspense will be over."

"That gives me a savage satisfaction. Do you know they call me mad here, when I am as sane as any man. Once in a while a cloud seems to pass over my mind, but I believe it is from being shut up here alone."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"During those periods I have a terrible desire to do murder; a red light seems to shine before my eyes, and my hands itch to tear some one to pieces. Do you understand, Mr. Jones?"

"Yes."

"Of course, I believe those are the signs of coming insanity—that if I am kept here for some time longer I will be mad indeed."

"Jesse James is near by."

"He will help me, I am sure."

"Even he has his price."

"I know it."

"You are to sign a paper?"

"Yes, it means freedom to me."

"Then you will do it?"

"Why not? But you do not think me mad?" he asks.

Paul knows it will not do to let the other realize what his real ideas on the subject are.

He must temporize.

That means deceive.

"You talk to me with as much sense as any man I know of, Mr. Gordon."

"Ah! I knew you would think so."

The prisoner's face begins to work in a spasmodic manner, as though he could not control the facial muscles.

Paul notices this fact.

It gives him a little uneasiness, for he understands what it means.

"Do you know the nature of the paper you are expected to sign?"

"I have an idea, but do not care to discuss it."

"Oh! it doesn't matter. I'll soon know."

"Who will tell you?"

"Jesse James."

"Then it will be all right if he speaks."

"You seem to have faith in him."

"I do."

"He is your friend."

"Once I was fortunate enough to help him. Jesse James is not ungrateful. He has always stood ready to help me when the time came."

"That is now."

"It has come."

"You fear Anson Merrick."

At the mere mention of the name the man's face grows fearfully dark.

"I hate him," he hisses.

"He reciprocates the feeling."

"Yes, and he has me where I have been unable to help myself. See yonder."

The man points to the window.

Heavy bars guard it.

There seems the air of a prison about the room.

The man's face twitches more violently.

His hands open and close spasmodically, as though eager to clutch something.

Perhaps he is thinking of his enemy, and how much od it would do him to have hold of Merrick.

How those hands would choke the breath out of his dy, and with what gloating would his eyes look upon e man's dying struggles.

The man's breath comes in gasps.

Paul keeps an eye on him.

He suspects the truth.

"Mr. Gordon, I desire to be posted regarding your con-

dition, mentally and bodily. Will you answer me a question or two?"

"Certainly, sir."

"How do you feel before one of these attacks?"

"As though the blood were all gathering in my brain—fiery figures dance before my eyes—my muscles twitch, and I seem to be eager to clutch objects and tear them to pieces."

"I understand. Now, Mr. Gordon, do you not feel that way now?"

"Yes—my brain grows hot—I begin to have that spasmodic feeling—that desire to see blood flow. You are right—it will be your death to be in the room ten minutes from now—I warn you—go while there is time."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE CHARM WORKED.

Paul feels a cold chill run through his frame when he hears the man's words and sees his terrible look.

It is enough to chill one's blood.

Jephtha Gordon has assumed a terrible expression—his eyes almost start from their sockets, and the muscles of his face seem drawn up into knots.

One would as soon face a tiger as such a human being.

Still Paul does not make a spring from the room; although menaced by such a terrible danger, he retains his extraordinary coolness.

The blazing orbs of the prisoner are met by a gaze that controls even his wild brain.

Paul will be master.

His power is amazing.

If he remains there long enough, however, he must expect to have this crazed creature at his throat, for the time will come when he cannot hold him in check.

"Jephtha Gordon, listen to me."

"I am listening," hoarsely replies the other.

"You feel one of those mad spells coming."

"It has already come."

"They leave you with a weakened hold upon your reason. Am I right?"

"Each time it seems as though I am longer in coming out of the darkness."

"I can save you the experience."

"What?"

"I can keep this spell from racking you. Even now it may be dissipated."

"Tell me. How?" almost gasps the wretch, trembling under his emotions.

He shakes as with the palsy.

"Will you obey me?"

"Yes—now—while I still have my mind. After five minutes I can promise nothing."

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES.

"It is enough."

Paul draws something out of his pocket and lays it on the table.

It proves to be a diminutive medicine case of leather, holding a dozen thick little vials.

He opens it.

Gordon watches him eagerly, holding his breath with fearful suspense.

Paul selects a certain vial.

This he hands to the other.

"Drain that."

The command is accompanied by nothing else, nor is it needed.

Gordon is confronted by a terrible crisis, and finds no time for weighing matters.

He seizes the vial.

Turning it up, he drains it.

"There; it is done."

"And you will be saved a terrible experience."

"What effect will it have?"

"In one minute you will feel a peculiar thrill pass through your brain."

"By the time two minutes have gone by a delicious sense of drowsiness comes over you, which it will be better for you to yield to easily."

"Already I feel the first symptoms."

"Yes; it is beginning to work."

"And I shall have peace?"

"This time you will. Lie down on yonder couch, Mr. Gordon. Be comfortable."

"First let me thank you."

Paul takes the groping hand.

"I feel—so—sleepy."

The detective leads him over to the cot, upon which he rolls with a sigh of relief.

In two minutes he is fast asleep.

All look of horror has left his face and a peaceful expression comes upon it, such as might have been seen when Paul entered the room.

He has conquered.

The detective has no reason to regret his share in the work.

Had the planning been given over into his own hands he could not have done better.

He rubs his hands together.

The game can go on now, and perhaps those against whom he has pitted his powers will learn what they have to meet.

Standing there, he looks down upon the slumbering man.

A grim smile creeps slowly over his face.

"I believe it could be made a success. At any rate, I have faith enough to try it."

This would indicate that whatever plan has come into his head, it must be a daring one which he has decided to try.

Long and earnestly he studies the face of the man before him.

"Yes; there is enough resemblance between us to make it possible."

He spends no more time in looking. It is the hour for action.

First he makes sure that the door is fast.

Then he proceeds to alter his appearance.

It is not hard to do this, with the material he always carries on hand, and united with his skill as an artist.

Quickly the change appears.

Ah! he grows more like the man lying there upon the cot.

Paul Smith disappears.

Jephtha Gordon the Second comes up.

In one hand the detective holds a small hand-glass, and in this he surveys himself while he continues to rub on the grease paint, or whatever is needed to effect the change.

He seems pleased himself.

Why not?

When one is satisfied with his work he need not feel troubled or let it weigh heavily upon his mind.

Their clothing is enough alike to avoid the necessity for a change, which pleases him full well under the circumstances.

It takes him just fifteen minutes to accomplish what has set out to perform.

This is quick work.

It shows his proficiency in his business of assuming the identity of other men.

Something more remains to be done, and this bothers the detective not a little.

It will never do to have two Jephtha Gordons in the field.

What is he to do with the other man?

He has been pondering over the matter, and is not helpless as he seems.

There are ways to be found when one is determined to advance upon a problem.

Paul makes up his mind.

He gently carries the senseless form over and deposits it beside the bed.

By degrees he pushes the man under.

Soon Gordon is entirely out of sight.

Any one entering the room would never dream that there is another occupant, unless the sleeping man gives a groan or otherwise betrays himself.

Satisfied with his work, Paul rises.

He knows what the effect of the medicine will be, and has no fear.

For a certain number of hours the man will sleep heavily.

Then his eyes may open.

No doubt he will be amazed at his situation, and unable to account for finding himself under the bed, but, so far as any injurious results from the potion are concerned, he need fear none.

Paul dismisses the unfortunate man from his mind or the time being.

He has other fish to fry.

First of all, he arranges the lamp so that all is a dense shadow under the bed.

Then he goes to the window.

This he finds closed, but it requires little manipulation to open it.

A cool night wind blows in.

This is delightful; the place has seemed so close before anhat his head buzzes.

Knowing what is coming, Paul examines the iron rods that the window.

As he expects, he finds them well rusted and not one-half as strong as they appear.

With a sharp-edged file he commences operations on item at the weakest point.

The rusty iron gives way before the gnawing edge of the file in a way that is simply wonderful.

Paul chuckles when he sees what progress he is making, and wonders how it comes Gordon has never gotten hold of something that would serve him in lieu of a file.

As the minutes pass he keeps up his work, and presently gives a bar a trial jerk.

It snaps.

He bends it aside.

One more will be enough.

He selects his point of attack.

Again the sharp-toothed file gnaws away.

How it seizes upon the rust-eaten iron, and carries it away in driplets.

In ten minutes he has cut through the second bar, and cast it aside.

The opening is complete.

If he chooses he can pass out of it now.

This the detective does not do.

He has other plans in view, which will be best served by remaining where he is.

The time?

It is not far from half-past one.

Surely, if Jesse James is coming to-night, as he believes, it will not be long now ere he puts in an appearance.

Paul sets to work in another quarter.

Taking the sheets from the bed, he proceeds to make a stout, serviceable rope.

Even one without practice can manage to form such a thing, and it would be hard to say that the detective had never seen the time in the past when he was compelled to escape from a difficulty in some such Don Juan manner.

At any rate, he shows great dexterity in tearing the sheets and knotting them together.

A rope is formed.

It will easily reach to the ground, for the window of the room is not very high.

Paul could easily discover some other means of accomplishing the same end.

He prefers this because he expects company and desires to make a sensation.

The rope is done.

Each knot he tests by hearty pulls.

No danger of this failing him.

A fall might prove to be an ugly thing, and he does not hanker after it under any circumstances. Hence his care in making the rude rope.

More than once he pauses to listen.

The suspicion has come into his head that he has heard some sound outside.

Then, as it is not repeated, he concludes he must have been mistaken.

Thus half an hour passes.

Two in the morning.

A rooster in some neighboring coop crows, and presently answering calls come from far and near.

Paul hears the racket and smiles.

His patience is simply wonderful.

It has conquered difficulties in the past that stood up like mountains, and the future will also present like opportunities.

It is the best stock in trade that a detective can possess.

There are times when a little patience will win a battle, and without much trouble.

The detective paces the room.

All seems silent within the house, but the same cannot be said of all the streets, where merrymakers still wander, determined to make a night of it.

Their laughter sounds weirdly on the night air.

New Orleans can know no peace now until the Mardi Gras carnival is of the past.

Again Paul fancies he hears sounds outside that betoken the presence of some one.

He listens.

Can it have been mere fancy again?

His wonderful patience is beginning to be rocked a little, and, unless something happens soon, he may find himself growing weary.

Ah! it is no mistake.

A little clicking sound attests the fact.

Paul knows what it means.

Some one below has cast a small pebble up, and this, striking the window, has produced the noise.

It is a signal.

The detective smiles.

Then he crosses the floor, and bends down beside the already open window.

CHAPTER IX.

JESSE JAMES SHOWS HIS HAND.

All is darkness without.

Paul's eyes have grown accustomed to the lamplight, and this makes it almost impossible for him to distinguish a single thing.

From the blackness comes a sound.

"Hist!"

The man in the window seems to start.

His eyes, gradually growing accustomed to the gloom, have discovered something.

A human face is near his own.

Some daring climber has managed to reach a point just below the window.

"Gordon—Jephtha Gordon!"

It is a whisper that comes floating upward.

"Who speaks?"

"A friend, man—one who has dared much in order to see you."

"A friend—alas, I have none."

"I am Jesse James."

"What! you here?"

"Yes, and I have come to help you escape."

"That is good news. See, I was just about to go."

"I can see the twisted bars. Is that some of your work, Gordon?"

"Yes."

"How were you going to get down?"

"I have a rope made of bed sheets. With its aid I can reach the ground."

The man clinging to the side of the house gives vent to his wonder.

"You have done well, Gordon, and it seems as though some kind fate must have sent us here to find you at this very time."

"Yes, yes. If you had come half an hour later I would have been gone."

"Are you prepared for flight?"

"I can be in a few minutes."

"And I will wait."

Paul, to give color to his words, pretends to be fussing around at the other end of the room.

Hearing a sound he turns, to find that the outlaw has entered the room.

Has he any motive in his action, or is it simple curiosity that urges him?

Paul turns.

"I'm about ready."

"All in the house seem to be asleep."

"Yes."

"It would not be hard to go through the place if there had a fortune stowed away."

Paul affects anxiety.

"You won't do that?" he exclaims.

The other laughs.

"Under the circumstances, as we don't know that there's a dollar in the house, I'm not going to take the trouble."

"Then let's go."

"Hark! what is that?"

The miserable Gordon has groaned in his sleep.

"What sort of a sound was it?"

"Not unlike a groan."

"It must have been some one snoring."

"But it seemed to come from under the bed yonder. There it is again."

"I've heard it often. Old Anson has his room below this, and when he lies on his back he snores. Come, I hate this place—it gives me the horrors. Let us be gone as soon as possible."

To this Jesse James does not seem averse.

He, too, desires to leave the place, in order to further certain of his plans.

So they move toward the window.

The late comer sees something in Paul's hand.

"What's that?" he asks.

"The rope."

"Are you sure it is strong?"

"I'd trust myself to it anywhere. Every knot is pulled hard."

"Let me see it."

He gives it several pulls.

"My life is precious to me, Gordon, and, although I don't believe it would kill a fellow to fall that distance, I have no desire to try it in the dark."

"Correct. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes. This rope will hold."

"Then let us get out of here."

"You are anxious to leave?"

Paul shudders perceptibly.

"I hate the place. It drives me mad. I've spent many unhappy hours in it that I hope never to see again. Come, let us be gone, man. Minutes passed here are like days to me. Make way."

"Go carefully, man."

"Why so?"

"You seem to forget that you have enemies in t

use. It is not yet too late for them to prevent your capture."

At this the other seems to wince, as though suddenly aught to his senses.

"Yes, I had forgotten."

At the same time he does not seem ready to give up the idea of leaving the place as speedily as possible.

The impromptu rope is in his hands.

He reaches the window and passes one end out, seizing the other about some article of furniture which could serve him as an anchor, holding his weight. all seems ready.

Is his rope long enough?

He does not doubt it.

"You are coming, Jesse James?"

"After you, yes."

Then away we go. Here's for success."

With the words he swings himself out, and seizing d of the knotted sheet, begins to descend in short er.

Thus he arrived at the bottom in good order, and a ke of the rope announces the result to his waiting d above.

Then Jesse James comes down.

He has found no trouble in climbing up to the window, yet it is much easier to slide down a rope than do vier work.

"Here we are, Gordon."

In the darkness a hand clasps the arm of the detective. He knows who it is, and makes out to be exceedingly pleased over the situation.

At last—liberty—how sweet."

His actions indicate that he has long looked forward his time, and now that it has arrived he trembles with letion.

Shaking his fist at the house, he mutters:

"When I come again, woe to you, Anson Merrick. going to make you sweat blood for all the wrongs I've heaped on me. It'll be a bad day for you when Gordon returns, and he will come back—mark down."

"Yes, indeed; it is only a question of time," muttered e James in his ear.

The man undoubtedly desires to keep on the right side im.

"Get away."

Jesse James has locked arms with the other, as though even suspects that Gordon may in some mysterious give him the slip.

The darkness that reigns over this part of the noisy such a thing can be easily done; it is within range te possibilities.

As they walk on Jesse James engages his companion in conversation.

He plays his cards skillfully.

He desires to keep Gordon's mind in a ferment, and his animosities aroused against Anson Merrick.

This is easily done.

Seeing the drift of his remarks, Paul falls into the trap apparently.

He raves against the other, calling him by all manner of names.

Once he plainly hears the outlaw chuckle and knows Jesse James is pleased.

They cannot long keep out of the lighted streets nor are they at all particular about it, since they have little to fear.

One of the first men they run across happens to be Jed Harkins.

The street arab is laughing with some fellows at a comical figure passing by, when the merriment freezes on his face, his eyes show signs of sudden alarm, and, with a loud cry, he turns and dashes wildly away.

At sight of the ranchero making such hot time down the street some mischievous fellows raise the cry of "Stop thief!"

Then a commotion follows.

Men try to stop the fleeing man, but his momentum is so good that they are doubled up like so many ninepins.

As the clamor increases, Jed's alarm follows suit, and he clears a swath through the crowd, his arms flying like a pair of old-fashioned flails.

Men shout after him.

The man has become demoralized and is no longer responsible for his actions.

A mad dog rushing along the street, pursued by a mob, could not have been more thoroughly frightened than he is.

Jesse James and his companion have seen him, and look after him with laughter.

Any one might be excused for doing so, even without knowing the circumstances of the case, and hence the outlaw does not think it odd that his companion should be laughing, even though presumably ignorant of the truth.

They see the mad fugitive no longer.

Pushing through the crowd they reach once more a retired spot.

"Where are you taking me, Jesse James?" asks the supposed Gordon, coming to a halt.

"To a place where we can with safety talk over your wrongs, man, and arrange a plan of revenge."

"Revenge! Ah! that stirs up my wolfish blood to fever heat. You may well tremble, Anson Merrick. My

time is near at hand. But this place—what is it—where is it?"

There is a certain amount of wildness in his manner—just enough to be noticed—and Jesse James does not feel altogether easy with regard to his companion.

Without doubt the music and uproar on the street excite his brain.

This is quite natural.

Such things always affect persons inclined to be crazy, and this is the kind of being Paul represents at present.

He plays his part to perfection.

Jesse James is anxious to get him under some kind of shelter, so that the intoxicating racket may cease to affect him.

They have left that portion of the city where the little white house is located, and entered the French quarter.

Jesse James comes to a halt in front of quite a good-looking building.

"Here we are," he says, cheerily.

"What! You live in such grand style?"

"For the present, yes. Through an agent I found out a gentleman who was going abroad and desired to let his house furnished. He was so delighted at finding a tenant ready to pay monthly in advance that he asked very few questions."

"This is lovely."

They mount the steps and with a nightkey the new proprietor of the old French mansion opens the broad door.

A light burns low in the hall.

"Enter, my friend. Here you are safe, and can defy Merrick to do his worst."

The other follows him in.

Velvet carpets yield to the feet.

All around are evidences of luxury.

Jesse James watches his companion stare about him with a smile that is almost a grin.

"You are surprised," he says.

"Yes, indeed. This is a noble house."

"Far too fine for a Missouri-hunted man like Jesse James to live in."

"I didn't say that," quickly.

"But you thought it, I'm sure. Never mind, I had my ideas in taking this house, and I'm sure it will pay me."

"Just so. Oh! this is comfort, and I have to thank you for it all, Jesse James."

With a sigh of relief the detective sinks into one of the soft easy-chairs at hand.

The other turns to hide his grin of triumph and makes a pretense of fastening the door.

Paul Smith would have had the shock of his life had he realized that Jesse James had suddenly penetrated his disguise.

But such was the case, and the outlaw was taking his own cruel method to do away with the man who dares step across his path.

CHAPTER X.

ATTEMPTED MURDER.

Playing his part, Paul allows his head to fall upon his arm.

He sleeps, to all intents and purposes.

Secretly Paul watches the other.

This he is enabled to do out of the corner of his eye, having assumed a position that allows of such a thing.

Thus far the little game has gone on without a break, and Paul cannot help but feel satisfied with his share of it.

What will Jesse James do with him?

Perhaps the man will attempt to shut him up, but he will be more than others have ever accomplished, if he succeeds.

Locks and bars have always failed in their work when endeavoring to hold this man.

Contrary to his expectation, the other does not try.

Instead, he throws himself into a chair, and seems busy himself thinking about the matters in which he is concerned.

Paul watches him as a tiger-cat might the game he expects to bounce on, though in this case there is more of the tiger about Jesse James than the man he is posed to.

At length the outlaw rises.

Whatever plan is in his mind he appears about to do something.

He glances toward the apparently slumbering man and seems satisfied to believe the god of sleep has maintained a firm hold of him.

The outlaw stands over him for a short time, as though lost in thought.

Then he bends down.

When Paul feels his hand rest upon his bosom a sudden suspicion darts through his mind—that the other is about to search him.

This must not be.

If Jesse James attempts to search him, it will be a signal for immediate action, for Paul has made up his mind as quick as a flash that he will not submit tamely.

His muscles are set.

To be or not to be—that is the question.

It is decided.

Jesse James wraps a handkerchief around the wrists of the seemingly slumbering man, and fastens them together tightly.

A piece of cord secures his ankles in the same manner.

the time being Paul is helpless. He watches the other through his half-closed eyes, wonders what he is up to. Presently the outlaw vanishes.

Whether he has gone to another part of the house or it altogether, Paul does not know.

His position is fairly comfortable.

He works his hands.

Imminently he realizes the fact that the man who has tied him to the chair knows his business.

They refuse to come apart.

After making quite a gallant effort, Paul stops to rest his breath.

Has he made progress?

His handkerchief may have stretched a little, but it is only perceptible.

A considerable amount of patience would be required to accomplish such a result.

At this time Paul becomes conscious of a certain faint odor.

The smell of burning wood can never be mistaken for anything else.

It thrill convulses him.

"Great Heaven! Can the house be on fire?"

The odor grows stronger.

He imagines he hears a crackling sound as if the flames are greedily licking up everything they come in contact with.

It may not be all imagination, either.

He thought of being at their mercy, bound hand and foot, and it is an unpleasant one.

He wonders whether Jesse James meant him to meet fate when he left him there in such a helpless condition.

It may be so, and yet he doubts it, seeing no reason for such savage treatment.

He smoke now pours into the room.

There can be no question in the wide world but that the house is on fire.

Paul struggles with his bonds again, the pungent odor driving him as it might a horse. Let an animal in his nostrils get a whiff of smoke, and he instantly exhibits all signs of alarm, snorting, pawing, and his eyes show fear.

Animals fear fire more than anything else in the world, and Paul Smith has always declared that he would rather meet any fate in the calendar than burning alive.

He seems to stand a fair show of it now.

His handkerchief is obstinate.

He will not give.

With almost superhuman energy Paul works away, but his progress is disheartening.

It is the advance of the flames.

He can hear them now without any mistake, roaring and crackling below.

They, no doubt, find much to feed on.

How long will it take them to climb one story, with the open stairs to act as a funnel.

Perhaps ten minutes.

Certainly not much more.

Can he effect his release?

He tries to think of some plan whereby he may accomplish it.

If there was only some sharp instrument near by which he could utilize, all would be well—a knife, or some such tool.

Useless—he knows of none.

Again he strains the muscles of his arms until they ache, but the obstinate binding refuses to give away a particle.

He raises his hands.

By a supreme effort he can get them to his face, and immediately his teeth close over the handkerchief, tearing at it furiously.

A minute passes.

Despair.

At the rate that marks his progress, the fire must certainly sweep over him before he can effect his release.

There seems no other way, and Paul feels the cold hand of despair grasp at his heart.

His mind wrestles with the one question, how to get rid of those hateful bonds.

They cut his wrists, but he knows it not.

Men have been fatally wounded in the heat and excitement of action, and knew nothing about it until afterward.

Will they never break or give away?

Oh! for the strength of a Samson, to part the hateful bonds while there is yet time to escape from the house.

Paul gathers an inspiration from the lamp.

Like cures like.

They fight fire with fire on the Western prairies and why should he not apply this remedy now.

Quick as a flash his mind is made up.

He wastes no time.

Forgetting that his ankles are tied, he comes very near breaking his neck, and only by a supreme effort manages to catch himself.

Then, by a peculiar shuffling movement of his feet, an inch at a time, he manages to go over to where the lamp rests on the table.

This consumes time, and just now time is of the greatest value to him.

As he stands there, panting heavily after his exertions, he has a visitor.

A tongue of flame shoots in through a door, looking like a serpent, and is as quickly withdrawn.

It will come again, emboldened by the visit, and no doubt bring others in its train.

Paul knows his chances are exceedingly small, and yet despair has not mastered him.

He steadies himself.

Then his hands are thrust over the lamp.

The flames send a fierce heat upward, and at once it seizes upon his flesh.

Paul shuts his teeth hard.

He must grin and bear it, for this heroic treatment is the only way in which he can expect to accomplish his purpose.

The cotton bonds are charred.

Now they take fire, and he can remove his hands, already blistered from the fierce heat, and allow the flames to do the business.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE ROOF.

It has been a fierce test, but Paul has come out of the trial with flying colors.

The twisted handkerchief burns.

With every advance of the little flame, the strength of the fabric grows less and less, and at a certain stage, it must give way entirely.

True, the heat scorches the skin on his hands, but this pain he bears without flinching, showing true heroism in his endurance.

The seconds seem hours.

It is always so when one suffers either mental or bodily pain.

All the while he keeps a steady strain upon the bonds, for the purpose of separating them at the earliest possible moment, when the fire has eaten out their strength.

Suddenly they part.

It is, indeed, time, for in several quarters the fire sweeps into the room, as if looking for its intended prey.

No sooner are his hands free than Paul rubs them together to induce circulation.

Then he thrusts one into his pocket.

A knife!

He must have it to cut himself free, for the cord is still around his ankles.

As his hand comes in contact with the pocketknife he carries, he snatches it out, opens the blade, and makes a slash at the bonds.

They part, and Paul is free.

Free to do what?

The fierce flames have cut off all hope of escape by

means of the stairs, where they are rushing up with fury of so many demons.

A man like Paul Smith is never at a loss in such emergency, and he immediately makes a rush for the nearest door.

He finds that he can pass through it, and reach another room beyond.

Paul discovers that he has hardly done himself good by this change, for while the door seems comparatively free from fire, the windows are encircled by the flames.

He can do no better in the front room.

Turning, he immediately makes a rush for the and, passing through, finds himself in the hallway.

The smoke is almost suffocating, but Paul b through it.

He reaches a flight of stairs, and he proceeds to as stumbling up the flight as best he can.

The smoke is just as bad above.

A door!

He bursts it in with a power given him through supernatural channel, and immediately enters the ament.

Smoke conceals everything from his view.

He realizes that his only escape is by the roof, groping about, he finds a ladder that reaches to scuttle.

Paul clammers up four steps of the ladder, and feels above him.

Here is quite a good-sized trap.

A chain secures it.

If there is a padlock upon this, he is lost, as his chance of escape will be swept away.

Hence, Paul holds his breath as he feels about to discover the truth.

This is not so much of a job, for the smoke is and keeps him from breathing freely.

The chain is fastened to a hook.

He manages to drop it at once.

Then an exertion of his strength causes the large door to open.

A current of air is immediately formed.

Paul, without waiting a second, drops down the again, just in time to see the flames make their appearance along the upper stairs, drawn, no doubt, by the opening which serves as a source of suction.

He scrambles through to the roof.

A grand, but terrible scene bursts upon his vision emerges from the scuttle. The smoke is pouring out the windows, and fire follows close in its wake, curling up above the eaves in places.

What is that hoarse, roaring sound, heard above the crackle of the fiery waves?

seems like the shouts of a multitude. With all to tell, it is that, and nothing more, the fire has drawn hundreds, yes, thousands of the night spectators from the main streets, and they crowd around, gazing at the scene with the liveliest interest.

Paul's first action upon reaching the roof is to close an trap.

He does this for a reason.

That open space serves as a funnel, and draws the smoke upward.

Incisive to his interest that the progress of the fire be delayed as long as possible.

When he moves to the end of the flat roof.

At one point it seems comparatively free from fire, and he is enabled to see downward.

The spectacle that meets his eyes will certainly ever remain in his memory.

It is a curious one.

The streets are thronged.

A sea of faces looks up at him, and a great groan of alarm ascends as they realize the fact that a human being is in peril.

What makes the scene more striking is the fact that most of the spectators are in fancy dress.

The glare of the fire reveals all manner of fantastic personages, monks, dames, gnomes and cavaliers, all instant upon seeing the fury of the conflagration.

Paul looks.

He does not waste a second thought on the people who groan, shouting out a score of suggestions uttering haphazard.

Knowing they cannot help him in the least, he turns his attention to another quarter.

Several engines are on the ground.

New Orleans may not have as finely equipped a fire department as New York, Cincinnati, or other Northern cities, but the members of it are just as bold and daring as any one.

They go at a fire with business in their eyes, and as though they mean to get there.

Already the steamers are at work, and a stream of water deluges Paul while he clings there.

He looks for a ladder wagon. None can be seen.

Perhaps some mistake has delayed it. He must endeavor to escape by means of the roof of an adjoining house.

This building is of stone. It may resist the fire—at any rate for a time.

How does the roof compare with that of the wooden building now a mass of flames?

A hasty observation shows the detective that there is a chance of escape in this direction.

The adjoining roof is a little higher, but he can climb to it.

He rushes back for the scuttle, which can serve him a good purpose now.

With a strength born of the emergency, he drags the cumbersome thing back with him.

When it is placed against the wall, he can clamber up to the roof of the stone mansion adjoining.

It is time.

The fire comes out through the open hatch, with a hiss and a savage roar.

One need not have a very vivid imagination to believe it is furious at being cheated of its prey.

Paul feels satisfied.

He now has a fighting chance for his life, which is all he can ask.

He believes there must be some means of leaving the roof upon which he now finds himself—a scuttle of some kind.

In another moment he finds it.

Despair!

It is secured within.

He tugs at it in vain. The chain holds.

Then Paul crawls to the edge of the roof to see what the chances are of dropping down.

He seeks the rear.

The flames of the burning house show him all he desires to see.

Below is an extension, and a ladder leads to the upper roof.

Down this he goes.

He is now two stories from the ground, and below is a kitchen roof. Paul wrests the ladder from its foundation, and makes use of it a second time.

In this way he finally reaches the ground in safety.

CHAPTER XII.

COMPLICATIONS.

In the meantime, Jesse James, believing he has succeeded in his diabolical plot to kill the detective, vanishes among the crowds that still swarm the streets.

An hour later the same man turns up the vicinity of the Merrick cottage.

Morning is not a great way off.

In this part of the city all seems quiet, as the merry-makers have shunned it.

The white cottage stands there ghostly and still.

Jesse James surveys it.

Not a light is seen.

Passing around to the side, he reaches the point under the window of the room which he left in company with the man whom he believes has perished in the flames.

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES.

The rope, made of a knotted bed sheet, still hangs there. In the darkness he finds it swinging idly to and fro with the night breeze.

Listening, and hearing no sounds above to indicate danger, the outlaw begins to climb.

He is athletic in his build, and used to accomplishing just such feats.

Hence, it is no great task for him to go up the knotted rope hand over hand.

The distance is not great.

He could reach the window even without the help of the rope, as he has demonstrated on the past occasion when about to enter the room.

Reaching the window, he pauses for breath, and to listen once more ere he enters.

All seems quiet; he puts one leg over the sill, and draws himself in.

The darkness is intense.

Jesse has not come here to grope around for an uncertainty.

He is bolder than that.

Taking out a match, he strikes it.

A lamp stands conveniently near.

To this he applies the blaze, and presently has a means of illumination.

Lest some one might observe him from without, he draws the shade down over the window.

Now he has the room to himself.

What investigations he means to put into practice can be done at once, for there is no one to hinder him.

It is a puzzle, what he expects to find in the late prison of Jephtha Gordon, but he has his own ideas on the subject.

He begins his search.

The night wind rustles the shade.

Now and then some passing merrymakers, heading homeward after the night's debauch, give sundry whoops and cries, or snatches of song, as they pass near by.

Beyond this, all is dead silence.

The search goes on.

It does not seem to pan out to the liking of the man, for he gives vent to sundry growls expressive of his displeasure.

He does not think it worth while to go to the window in order to make an observation. If he should do so, he might learn something of a nature to surprise him.

In the midst of his search, Jesse James suddenly raises his head.

What has he heard?

Was that a groan?

He remembers having heard it before, and Gordon passed it over by declaring it was the snoring of Anson Merrick in the room below.

As he stands there listening for the sound, it once more to his ears.

Surely that is a groan.

The outlaw has heard too many such to find himself mistaken now.

An investigation is in order.

With a cry of exultation, he springs to the bed, which the sheets have been stripped to form the hanging from the window at this minute.

As he stoops down beside it, another groan wells from underneath the cot. He feels that he is on the verge of a discovery.

As his head gets below the level of the bed, he can see an object underneath.

It is the figure of a man.

Jesse James does not hesitate.

Reaching in his hand, he clutches a leg, and draws an unknown out from under the bed.

As the lamplight falls upon that face, the outlaw holds his breath in awe.

As he suspected, it is Jephtha Gordon!

He knows the features well.

Ah! the man on the floor gives signs of returning to consciousness; Jesse James bends eagerly over his form.

Whatever the drug given to Jephtha Gordon might be, it has evidently accomplished its full mission, and the man is returning once more to his natural condition.

This is a consummation devoutly to be wished by the outlaw.

He awaits with some eagerness the moment when the man shall have returned to his senses.

The man shivers.

His eyelids tremble.

Once he opens his eyes and looks up in a vague way, seeing only vacancy.

By degrees, however, he draws nearer his normal condition, and it will only be a minute or so before he arrives at that point.

At last his eyes seek the face of the man who has been over him.

A look of recognition flashes over his face.

"You have come, Jesse James," he mutters.

The other starts.

He seems to feel a deeper interest in the matter than ever before.

"You are Jephtha Gordon?"

"I am. Where am I—how did you get here—I remember, you sent him to me."

"Him?" eagerly.

"Yes, the man who saved me from having one of the bad spells."

"How did he do it?"

"By giving me some liquid that quieted my brain a

me to sleep. He said you might be with me when I
slept."

Jesse James smiles grimly.

He is not amazed at its tenor.

Gordon, I have something to tell you that will give
you a shock."

What?"

That man was a fraud."

Well, he came from you."

It is false. I never saw him before."

Well, he saved me from an attack."

And rolled you under the bed."

Why did he do that?"

Because he expected me to come."

I don't understand."

You will when I explain further. When he had
led you out of sight he disguised himself until he was
second Jephtha Gordon."

What?"

Then he broke the bars of yonder window and ar-
raged for flight."

What manner of man was he; they have baffled me
for a time."

Ah! he was prepared for an emergency. After he
had made the opening, he tore up the bed sheet and made
a dittope."

Wonderful man."

About this time I arrived on the scene, coming to
cue you. He pretended to be Jephtha Gordon. We
sat off together to a house I had rented."

I'll make him sweat for it."

I don't think you'll have the chance, Gordon."

Why not?"

I believe the man is dead."

At this the other expresses surprise and asks how such
a thing occurred.

Jesse James tells the story.

He omits what he pleases.

Enough remains to give the other a pretty good idea
of the facts, and although horrified at the awful fate that
has overtaken the man in the burning house, it is no af-
fair of his.

All this while neither of the men seem to notice a cer-
tain fact.

The window shade flaps in the breeze still.

It is a trifle higher than when the hand of Jesse James
saw it down.

Some unseen agency has done this.

There is a crack below the curtain now, some two
ches or so in diameter.

Such an opening affords a good opportunity for spying
on the inmates of the room, and some one seems dis-

posed to do it, for a glimpse of a human face can be seen
in the opening.

Whoever the party may be he seems to have a decided
interest in the drama being played within that room.

Gordon asks questions, and his companion answers
them as he sees fit.

"Where does Merrick sleep?" he asks.

"The second room from this."

"Not below, then, as he said?"

"That was given for a purpose, as you declared—to de-
ceive you about the groan."

"Is he a sound sleeper?"

"Generally so, I believe. I've made lots of noise in the
night, and he never seems to mind."

"If I can open your door, I'm going to pay him a visit."

"That man came in by the door."

"Then I reckon I can pass out."

"What shall I do?"

"Remain here until I'm ready for you. This night
shall see Anson Merrick baffled."

He passes to the door.

Examining this, he soon discovers that it can be read-
ily opened.

"Watch and wait."

These are the last words he sends back in the direction
of the other.

Then he closes the door quietly.

He is gone.

Jephtha Gordon, left alone, paces the floor for a min-
ute or two in uneasiness.

When he can apparently stand it no longer, he sinks
down upon a chair and lets his head fall upon his arms,
which rest on the table.

It is the attitude of a man whose brain is full of con-
flicting emotions that overpower him.

He sees nothing, hears nothing.

The night winds plays with the drawn curtain.

Is it the breeze that pushes it aside, though?

Strangely enough, a human figure noiselessly crawls
over the sill, lands on its knees, gains its feet, and van-
ishes behind a piece of furniture.

The man bending over the table does not move.

If he has heard, he does not heed.

What strange actions are these?

Who seeks to gain an unbidden entrance to the house
in this way?

The man at the table heeds not his presence, until a
hand is laid on his shoulder.

Then he looks up.

Two revolvers face him.

Back of him is a stern countenance, which is very like
his own.

He realizes that this man means business, and that his action imposes silence.

Being a sensible man, he does not make any outcry, but asks quietly :

"What do you want?"

"Silence on your part."

"Well, I am dumb."

"I do not mean you any harm, Gordon, provided you can obey."

"Yes, but only to have him die here; that I am ready to accomplish. Remain silent, go with me into a place of hiding."

"You don't intend to harm me?"

"No. What is more, I am your real friend."

"Come with me," adds the detective.

The other makes no resistance.

Though by nature an obstinate man, the liquid which brought sleep to his brain has left some effect behind.

He appears singularly docile.

"Take me where you will," he says.

So Paul leads him to a closet and the door is closed on him.

This leaves Paul alone.

The trap is set again.

It will be remembered that Paul is still made up to resemble Gordon.

When Jesse James comes back, he will doubtless fall into the error, unless the detective betrays himself through some blunder.

Minutes pass.

What is Jesse James doing?

His boldness has, no doubt, induced him to enter upon a game that must bring affairs to a crisis between himself and Gordon.

Paul expects to hear the bull-like voice of the master of the house every second.

Will he come?

No one refuses an invitation given by this man of notoriety. It may be set down as certain that his invitation, backed up by a show of violence, will be obeyed.

What then?

A little scene is to follow, dramatic in its nature. For a brief time they will allow Jesse James to believe he is winning on the jump.

Then, at a touch from the magician's wand, a change must come over the spirit of his dream.

A grand transformation scene will ensue.

How long it seems to take the man!

Can he be doing something else?

Perhaps in some way he has taken the alarm, and fled from the house.

Paul hopes not.

As best he can, he restrains his impatience, and developments.

It will not be for long.

Already he hears a movement of some sort in hand. Jesse James is perhaps arousing the master house.

As Anson Merrick is a heavy sleeper, this is q task in itself.

The sounds increase.

A door stands ajar, and each individual species of comes readily to their ears.

Ah! that is Merrick's tuneful voice. It sounds foghorn at sea.

"A prisoner in my own house! Great Caesar beats the Dutch!" he bellows.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE THE COURT MARTIAL.

The drama is again under way, and what threat be the last act has opened.

In response to the roar of Anson Merrick, the quiet determined voice of his captor sounds.

"Yes, you are a prisoner, and unless you do all I demand I'll send a bullet through your brain. You understand, Captain Merrick?"

"Well, I'm an American, and plain English strike direct. I'm an old sailor, too, and I know by the cr your jib that you mean business."

"Exactly."

"What d'ye want with me—money?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because you look as if you wasn't above taking people's things."

The clear laugh of the outlaw follows this.

"That's been my business for years, Merrick; but at present I'm after something different."

"The devil you are."

"I've just come from your prisoner."

"What?"

"Jephtha Gordon."

"Is that chap in the game, too?"

"He has a decided interest in it."

"Who the deuce are you, fellow?"

"Make a guess."

"You're a cool dicky, anyhow. You say Gordon old friend of yours?"

"Yes."

"I've caught him trying to send a letter to a ce party four different times."

"Poor devil!"

"Then you are Jesse James?"

"That's my name."

and You're a bold one."

Why so?"

Coming to New Orleans with a price on your head, or alive."

Bah! I've carried my life in my hands for years, and yet feared a living man. I've been in New York, St. Louis and many cities, but no one has ever put his hand on me and call me his prisoner."

What do you want with me?"

To bring you before your judge."

The deuce—who's that?"

Gordon."

What if I refuse to go?"

That would be dangerous."

Oh! you're one of those highly-explosive chaps that off so easily."

No; but I haven't come here to meet with defeat at hands. I am accustomed to being obeyed when I e an order."

Then I suppose I've no escape."

If you're wise, Anson Merrick, you'll go with me hout trouble."

Lead on."

Oh, no; I've cut my eye teeth, sir,"

What d'ye mean?" he exclaims.

I never lead a prisoner, but make him walk in front me, where I can see whether he means treachery, and keock him on the head before he has much chance to do crm."

At this comes a vociferous laugh.

One would imagine that the old sea captain must be a ant in stature, to judge from the hoarse voice he pos sses, which seems to rumble up from his very boots.

A sight of him is disappointing.

He is short in stature, though stocky.

You are a shrewd as well as a bold man, Jesse James. respect such traits. Hence, knowing when I am well f, I bow my head to you. Where do you want me to d?"

Lead the way to Gordon's den."

It is locked."

You are mistaken."

How—did you—"

I came out of there just now, captain. Make a move, lease."

The other realizes that it is best for him to obey orders. I learned this long ago, and hence starts away.

Jesse James is close behind him, and holds a revolver his hand, as though ready to put his threat into execu on in case the other proves balky or treacherous.

They march thus to the door of the room where Paul mith awaits them.

He is perfectly composed, and means to get the best he can out of the game.

Merrick enters the room and strides up to the other with a frown.

"So this is all your doing, Jephtha Gordon. You think you have triumphed at last," he says, with bitterness in his hoarse voice.

"Every dog has his day, they say, and you have had yours. My turn has come, Merrick," the other calmly remarks.

"We'll see. He laughs loudest who laughs last. This thing isn't done yet, my heart."

"Not by a long sight," says Jesse James, with emphasis; "not by a long sight; but you'll admit that it's Jephtha's inning. He has the bulge on you at present—he and myself."

"Well, I'm here."

With that Merrick throws himself into a chair in a careless manner, which seems to say: "What do you mean to do about it?"

Jesse James admires the man's bravado.

It is this element that tells with him every time.

If a man is a reckless daredevil, he may be guilty of all the sins in the calendar, and not lose caste in the eyes of Jesse James.

People generally admire those who possess their own qualities, to a greater extent.

This man has always been known as a perfect fire-eater, and it is this quality that has saved his life on many occasions where a less daring person would have gone under.

Jesse James looks to Gordon, believing he will start the ball rolling.

This Paul is ready to do.

There is always a chance that Jesse James may ent ertain suspicions, but if so they will be with regard to his sanity, and not in connection with his identity.

He can afford to let them pass.

With the one great object in view of probing the mystery to the bottom, he starts out.

It is to be sincerely hoped there will be no interruption to the game just when it reaches the most critical stage.

It would be too bad to have Gordon storm into the room, half crazy, after the matter has gone forward to a certain stage.

Bad luck! Well, surely that could be set down as such.

He trusts it may not come, gives one glance around, and applies himself to the task that is to occupy his attention.

"You have had me in your power for a long time, Anson Merrick."

"Well, perhaps it has seemed so to you. It can't be pleasant to be shut up. The days and nights must be wearisome," returns the other.

"Why have you locked me up?"

"I've told you several times. You have freaks of madness, when you are not responsible. I do this to protect the public against you."

"It is very kind of you to consider the public."

"Don't mention it," with a wave of the hand.

"I've been under the opinion, however, that there was another motive deeper than this."

"Ah!"

"You kept me in your power, Anson Merrick, because I could be made profitable."

"Humbug."

"You knew I was connected with your family, and perhaps pride had something to do with it."

"Of course; proud to claim relationship. Your past is so honorable, you know."

Paul never minds the sneer.

It really gives him a clew.

"Again, you knew you were once connected with a gang under Captain Ben Hooker. We dealt in cotton; the authorities gave us a bad turn, and in the fight all went under but one—myself."

"This is stale news to me."

"I presume so. I am gradually getting to a point where you may learn something new."

"Glad to hear it."

"That one man is supposed to hold the key to all the treasure stowed away by the river pirates. You have lived in hopes that at some unguarded moment I might let that secret fall."

"Bah! I gave up that idea long ago."

"And yet there is never a time the fit of madness comes upon me that you are not listening in the next room to discover whether I speak of the old days or not."

Merrick growls.

"Confusion take you, Gordon, how did you ever learn that?" he demands.

"Never mind," he says. "I know more than you have ever given me credit for."

"Crazy men generally do."

"No slurs, Merrick. You are in my power now, and it doesn't become you to throw stones. Perhaps I may take a notion to shut you up as you did me, and feed you on bread and water to crush some of your spirit."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Wait and see. Thus far your efforts have not been crowned with much success; but you believe you are

on the right track, and you mean to keep it up, if the chance offers."

"No, I threw it up long ago."

"And yet you are working on another tack, which amounts to the same thing."

Merrick grits his teeth and says nothing, upon which Paul hammers away again.

"You found a piece of paper on my person, which you have kept ever since. It was half of a sheet, and you could just make enough sense out of it to discover that were it complete, you would have the record you are endeavoring to reach—the secret hiding-place of the treasure."

While speaking the detective is watching Jesse James more than Merrick.

He sees the other start.

This gives him an idea that the suspicion he has entertained all along is correct.

He makes a note of it.

As for Merrick, the accusation seems to confuse him, for he squirms under it.

"Produce that paper."

"I refuse."

"Then it will have to be done by force. This gentleman will attend to it."

Jesse James steps up.

"I'll attend to that, Gordon. This man will not refuse me."

Then he lays a hand on Merrick's arm.

"Well?" defiantly.

"I want it."

"You do?"

"I have spoken—hand it out."

There is a momentary struggle between them as eye meets eye, but the old sea dog is no match for the Missouri outlaw.

He gives in.

The manner in which he hangs his head is sufficient evidence to prove this. His white flag, betokening surrender, is in his face.

"Not to you, Jesse James, will I give it up."

"Then deliver it to the proper owner," returns the other, satisfied with his victory, and willing to allow Merrick this small satisfaction.

"Do you ask for it, Jephtha?"

"I have said so; you will see what good use I mean to put it to."

Merrick draws out a long, flat pocket-book, and from its covers takes a folded piece of paper which he hands over to the other.

When Paul receives it he takes one glance to assure himself it is the right document.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT LAST.

up, if us far all seems well.

ese document is just what he expected and yet his
ck, we in this quarter is but half done.

he pretends to look at it earnestly.

on when his eyes are raised.

Jesse James."

hich Yes."

and Let me have the missing half of this paper."

ver How do you know I have it?"

you Come, this is no time for foolish fancies."

e of On one condition will I agree."

Name it."

Ja "That you swear to me you will not destroy the pa-
t, or allow any one else to."

has "I agree to that."

se "Then you shall have the missing paper."

es "You believed I had the other half?"

g "Yes," hesitatingly.

ot "And you could make enough out of what you had
tell you it meant a buried treasure?"

ot "Perhaps so."

is "Which would account in a measure for the disinter-
ted friendship you have shown."

is "This is no time to talk of that."

ot "Very good."

ot Paul's fingers close upon the paper with a thrill of
light; it seems to him as though this might be the
lmination of a dream.

is He has long hoped for such a thing to come to pass,
thout really believing it would do so, and now that
ccess seems assured, he may well be pardoned for
ving way to such a feeling.

is A glance shows him something, however.

is "You've given me the wrong paper, Jesse James."

M "Oh! excuse me."

ici Whether the outlaw means it or not he cannot say,
ut there is a mocking smile upon his face as he
hanges the documents, that would indicate as much.

s This time the proper paper is received.

is Paul places it alongside the piece he has taken from
Merrick.

is They correspond, even the notches where the paper is
llored, fitting.

is This is a triumph.

ne The detective feels that he is nearer the end of his trail
han at any time thus far, and Jesse James will not have
chance to set eyes on the promised land he has had in
view ever since he came into possession of that paper.

an He calmly folds both leaves up and places them in an
inside pocket.

is "Hark!"

Coming from somewhere in the darkness of a closet
near by sounds a whining voice.

"Let me out of this now, or I'll have a fit. I must have
air, I tell you—air, air!"

It is Gordon.

Paul knows the cat is out of the bag, but since his end
is attained, he does not care.

The sooner this comedy of errors is closed up, the bet-
ter satisfied he will be.

"What does it mean?" demands Merrick, amazed, for
he, too, recognizes the voice.

"Just this. The man before you isn't Jephtha Gordon
at all, but a miserable fraud," exclaims Jesse James, his
face setting like stone and his hand edging toward his
revolver.

Paul smiles.

He doesn't seem to realize his danger.

"Look at me, Anson Merrick. This man declares I
am not Jephtha Gordon," he says.

Merrick has been looking at him steadily.

"Stay, I can tell," he says.

"Ah! a birthmark, eh?"

"Hold out your hand."

"Which one?"

"The right."

Paul transfers his revolver to the other hand, and holds
out the one indicated.

Merrick takes one glance.

"You are a cheat."

"How do you know?"

"A fraud, sir."

"Tell me how you know?"

"The real Jephtha Gordon has lost the top of the third
finger of the right hand; a pistol went off by accident
when he was handling it, and carried away a portion of
his anatomy."

"Well, I admit the corn."

"You are not my brother-in-law."

"I am not Jephtha Gordon."

"Then state your identity."

"Name—Paul Smith."

"Profession—detective."

"Business—accomplished," and with the last word he
slaps his breast where the divided paper rests in security.
Merrick seems astonished.

While the detective has been talking, Jesse James' coat
has been bulging suspiciously.

His hand had made its way within his coat toward his
belt.

No sooner does the detective disclose his identity than
Jesse James uttered a terrible oath and at the same in-
stant a puff of smoke emerges from his coat, accom-
panied by the sharp report of a revolver.

The detective has been over-confident.

He is taken unawares.

Though the aim was a most difficult one, the noted outlaw's luck never deserts him and the bullet hurries on its mission, burying itself deep in the detective's shoulder.

Paul falls over backward, upsetting his chair in his descent.

Merrick is too stupefied to move. Jesse James springs to the detective's side.

In a twinkling his hand has closed over the precious papers, and he springs back holding them aloft in his hand.

"The secret of the treasure," he shouts, his voice ringing, exultantly.

But now Merrick recovers himself and springs toward the outlaw.

"Back, you fool!" shouts Jesse. "Do you suppose you can down Jesse James?"

His revolver is aimed at the head of the unfortunate Merrick, and, as he speaks, he pulls the trigger.

Without waiting to see the effect of his bullet, he dashes toward the window.

As he does so, the real Jephtha Gordon emerges from his hiding-place.

There is another report, and the sole survivor of the Hooker gang falls at last with a bullet in his brain.

Stopping for an instant with one foot on the windowsill, the outlaw surveys the scene in which he had been so recently a minor figure, but was now the prime mover.

It is just like Jesse James.

He was ever turning the tables on his enemies in some such manner.

He slides down the rope easily and edges stealthily away from the scene.

It is possible some one heard the shots, and before long it will be a mighty unsafe place for him to be in.

"Dead men tell no tales," he mutters, his voice shaking in exultation as he hurries from the scene, "and with these papers in my possession, I am the only person on earth who can locate the lost treasure."

He was right.

Jephtha Gordon was dead.

Paul Smith, the detective, though not mortally wounded, had not seen where the gold was hidden in his hasty glance of the papers.

Indeed, he was the only one left who knew of the existence of the papers, for Merrick died a few days later from the effects of his wound. He never regained consciousness.

The finding of the vast treasure by Jesse James and his

gang in the spot where the river pirates had hidden it away, is a matter of history.

Despite all the efforts of those who had lost it, no trace was ever found of the treasure. Every one knew that the James boys had secured it, but what they did with it is still a mystery.

Some say it was melted and sold to the United States Government.

Be this as it may, it is known that Jesse James was heard of soon after in Missouri, where he was once more engaged in his old business of stopping trains on the Iron Mountain road, and relieving the express cars of their valuable contents, varying the monotony now and then by a raid on some town bank where they keep a fat deposit and have some poor system of guarding it.

It was a month before Paul recovered from his wounds, but when he did, he swore a solemn vow never to rest until he had tracked to his death the king of the outlaws.

As might be expected, Jesse James heard from him again, when the detective pursued him in one of the closest and most dangerous hunts the outlaw had ever experienced. The story detailing this thrilling episode will appear in No. 16 of the JESSE JAMES WEEKLY.

THE END.

Next week's JESSE JAMES STORIES (No. 15) will contain "Jesse James' Signal Code; or, The Outlaw Gang's Desperate Strategy."

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- 8—Jesse James' Daring Deed; or, The Raid on the Pine Ridge Jail.
- 7—Jesse James, Rube Burrows & Co.
- 6—Jesse James in Wyoming; or, The Den in the Black Hills.
- 5—Jesse James' Oath; or, Tracked to Death.
- 4—Jesse James' Black Agents; or, The Wild Raid on Bullion City.
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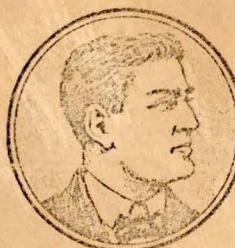
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